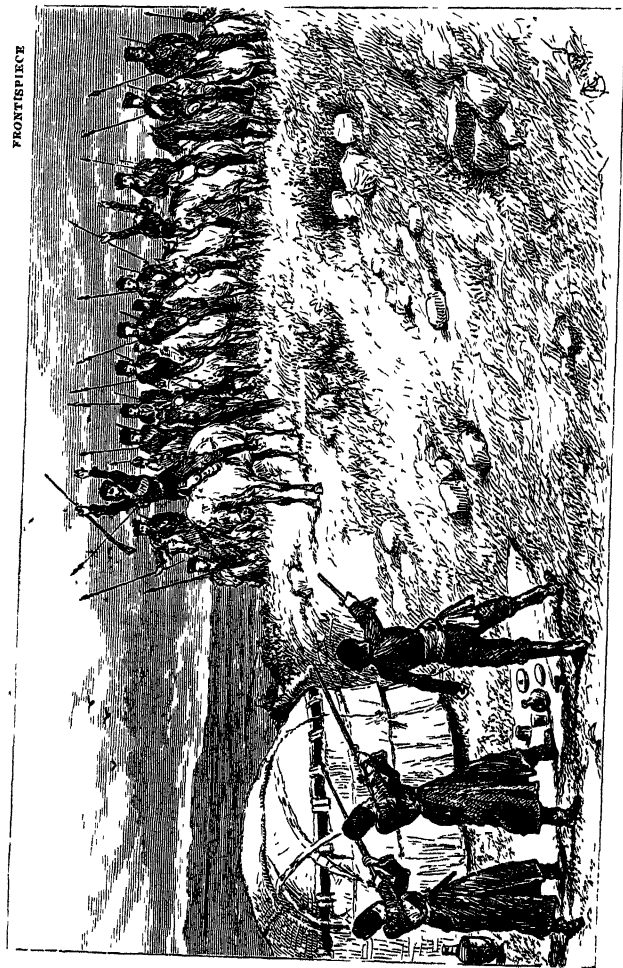


THE BOY SLAVE IN BOKHARA.





“‘Caught!’ shouted Stepan snatching up his rifle ‘Let’s have life for life, boys!’” — Page 32

THE BOY SLAVE
IN BOKHARA.



DAVID KER,

AUTHOR OF "ON THE ROAD TO KHIVA."

NEW EDITION,

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

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TO

MY BROTHER,

THIS WORK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

P R E F A C E.

IN the following work I have attempted to group real scenes round an imaginary hero, and to convey genuine information in a more attractive form than that of a mere dry statistical report. Before these lines appear, I shall hope to be on my travels again; but if they can help to give a "Merry Christmas" to any little countryman at home, I shall be amply repaid.

DAVID KER.

June 1874.

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THE BOY SLAVE IN BOKHARA.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES THE HERO.

"OSTAP DANILEVITCH,* here's a gentleman asking for you."

"Show him in."

"This way, if you please."

And I am ushered through a thick bosquet of spreading trees, which even the sun of Central Asia can hardly penetrate, to the door of one of those little painted summer-houses of which I have already seen at least a dozen since my arrival in Tashkent. For in this glorious climate, where houses are used merely as places of refuge when it happens to be wet, you leave your name at a garden-gate instead of a front door, and are received by your friends, not in a well-carpeted drawing-room with a blazing fire, but in a maze of shrubbery hidden from the world behind a high wall of baked earth.

* Ostap, the son of Daniel. The customary form of address in Russia, even from a servant, is by one's own name and that of one's father.

At the door of the pavilion, bowing courteously as I approach, stands a tall man in white cotton jacket and red trousers of dressed goatskin *—no less a person than Capt. Ostap Danilevitch Kostarenko, described by the Russian friend who has recommended me to him, as “a man who knows more about Central Asia than any other three in Tashkent.”

With all respect to those admirable novelists who give to their heroes “that look of inborn power and majesty which tells at the first glance that one of the world’s heroes stands before you,” I doubt whether the first sight of a really great man ever impresses one as it ought to do. The *visa* of genius, like that of a Russian passport-office, is at times rather illegible. I can quite believe that many of Homer’s acquaintances thought him a flighty old fellow, with a craze for music, so fond of hearing his own voice that he never knew when to stop. There were probably numbers of respectable old senators who shook their heads dismally over young Julius Cæsar, as a wild harum-scarum lad who would never come to any good. I myself do not remember to have been particularly impressed by my first view of General Todleben, or Count von Moltke, or Prince Gortschakoff, or the Emperor of Brazil. And

* Goatskin trousers are chiefly worn by the soldiers, but frequently adopted by the officers when much on horseback. I myself found them very useful during my last month in Central Asia.

so, too, with my present visit. Standing face to face with the most extraordinary man whom I have ever met, I see nothing more in him, for the moment, than a weather-beaten Cossack officer of the usual type, a trifle more polished than the average. The one thing about him which strikes me at first sight is the restless watchfulness of his eyes, which run all over me with the look of a man watching to parry a blow. I suddenly remember to have seen exactly the same look on the face of a man in charge of some twenty of the most dangerous ruffians in South America; and I inwardly wonder whether my new friend has done similar work in his time.

“Glad to see you, Mr Ker; I’ve heard a good deal about you from my friends. Step inside, and sit down.”

I enter the pavilion, and, to my amazement, recognize its interior as the exact semblance of a Turkoman tent, just as I have seen it scores of times during my long journey across the desert. The sheet of grey *voilock* (felt) spread over the floor; the pile of shawls doing duty for a pillow; the extraordinary collection of miscellaneous objects hanging to the tent-poles; the heavy flap of skin ready to let fall over the entrance; even the embossed sabre, silver-mounted pistols, and high sheepskin cap—all the details of the genuine

desert "interior." The only incongruous objects are a small chair and a light table, from which my host sweeps a mass of papers as I approach.

"You'll think I have a queer taste in furniture," says he, with a strange smile, which lights up his dark face like a flash of lightning across a moonless sky. "It's a fancy of mine—but not without some reason, after all. However, we'll talk of that by-and-by; the first thing is to give you some tea. Are you there, my love?"

"Here I am," answers a clear voice; and in the doorway appears a tall and very handsome woman (seemingly about twenty-two), whom Captain Kostarenko presents to me as his wife.

"This gentleman has travelled a good deal," he adds; "so you must give him a very good glass of tea, for the credit of Tashkent."

The lady vanishes and re-appears in an instant with a huge tray, on which stand three tumblers of rich aromatic tea, each with a thin slice of lemon floating in it in place of milk; a saucer of rusks, another of lump sugar, and another of sliced bread. My charming hostess insists upon serving me with her own hands, while her husband brings in two more chairs to complete the circle; and I, while sipping my tea, take a closer survey of my new acquaintances.

It is satisfactory to recollect that, even before I knew

what he had done, I picked out Kostarenko as one of the most athletic men I have ever seen, and any English trainer would have done the like. His long, gaunt, bony frame, tough as whipcord, and without an ounce of superfluous flesh, might pass muster in any trial of strength, from climbing the Matterhorn to coming in first in a paper-chase. His age is not easy to guess, for if his short black hair be without a streak of grey, and the lines of his face firm as if carved in granite; there is, on the other hand, a look about the whole man of rough seasoning, of long and hard experience, such as only time and trial can bestow.

And the face is worthy of the figure. The low broad forehead, square and massive as the keep of a Norman castle, the small, black, deep-set eyes, which seem to take in everything without looking full at anything, the hooked nose curving over the heavy moustache, the grim firmness of the thin lips and iron jaw—all have a weird impressiveness of their own, which grows upon me the longer I look. One can fancy those lips parting to utter a shout of battle or a sentence of death, but it is difficult to imagine them ever softening into a smile or murmuring words of tenderness. It may be the deep bronze of the complexion, or the aquiline profile, or the bushy moustache, or the look of unbending resolution, or all four combined, that suddenly

recall to me another face which the world will not easily forget—that of brave old David Livingstone.

Turning from the Captain to his wife, I am startled to note in her face the reflection, as it were, of the sternness that marks his. Despite the deep rich colour, the large, tender, trusting eyes, and the striking beauty of the features, the whole countenance, even in repose, has in it something menacing and terrible ; and I already guess that those two faces must have a strange history—a history which, perhaps, not many would care to hear to the end.

“So you want to know about the countries round here?” says Kostarenko, draining his second tumbler with the long, slow, enjoyable draught of the habitual tea-drinker. “What part shall I tell you about? If you’re for Samarcand you can post all the way across the Hungry Steppe, crossing the Syr-Daria at Tchinz—the only thing against you is the heat and dust. If you’re for Kashgar you can get there across the mountains, by way of Kokan and Andedjan, in ten or eleven days, if you ride hard ; but I wouldn’t advise you to try it now, for Kokan’s not quite quiet yet after the insurrection, and they have a way there of beheading you first and asking who you are afterwards. If you want to get to India you had better go by Merv and Herat—for the nearest way, through Balkh and

by the Khyber Pass, is impossible just now. I met a Jew at Samarcand the other day who said he had done it, but when I began to question him the story fell through directly."

"Do you know Bokhara well?"

"Pretty well," answers the Captain with another of his ominous smiles, "I was a slave there for several years."

Used as I am to the surprises of this extraordinary region, I start as if I were shot. That men *have* survived the furnace of Bokharian slavery I already know from my own observation ; but to find an ex-slave high in power, unbroken in strength, married to a beautiful woman, surrounded by every comfort, with the manners of a gentleman and the bearing of a Commander-in-Chief, is startling even to me.

"Do me a great favour, Ostap Danilevitch, just tell me how that happened : it must be a good story."

"With pleasure—but it's rather too long for one evening. I'll give you the beginning to-night, and then, if you're good enough to care about the continuation, you can come back and hear it whenever you please."

My friend was as good as his word ; and it is from his narrative (eked out by a few official documents) that the following tale has been compiled.

CHAPTER II.

THE POUNCE OF THE VULTURE.

I REMEMBER as if it were yesterday (begins my new friend) the night when Capt. Naprashkin (he was only a captain then) came back from a month's scouring over the steppes with his Cossacks, and walked into our hut, and took me on his knee, and looked at me a long time without speaking.

We used to live at Orsk* in those days, in a little hut in the main street of the town, close to where the post-house now stands. My mother had died when I was quite a baby, before I could even remember her; and my father was a sergeant of the Orenburg Cossacks, and had to be away for weeks together with his *sotnia* (squadron of a hundred), hunting after the Kirghiz and Bashkirs, to keep them from disturbing the new colonies which we had been planting upon the eastern steppes. So whenever he came back from one of these forays, I and my old aunt, Martha Timopheievna (may God rest her soul!) made quite a holiday of it; and I

* A little frontier town of log-huts, on the river Ural, one hundred and seventy-six miles east of Orenburg.

would run to unstrap his havresack, and hang up his cap and white frock ; and Aunt Martha would kiss him on both cheeks, and bustle about to get ready the cabbage-soup and vodka (corn-whisky) for him, and pick him out the freshest bread, and the best bit of salt cucumber ; and he would get into the warm corner by the stove, and take me on his knee, and tell me stories about what he had seen and done among the wild heathen folk out there in the great desert.

So that evening, when we saw the "white jackets" and their horses coming trampling down the hillside into the town, we made haste home to get my father's supper ready, and be there to welcome him when he came. But we waited and waited, and he didn't come ; and we were beginning to wonder, when suddenly the door opened, and in marched Capt. Naprashkin !

Now, the Captain was always very fond of my father, who had served a long time under him ; and to see how good he was to us, no one would have thought that he was an officer, and we only common folk. But still, it was not often that he came to see us like this ; so what with his coming in so suddenly, and what with the strange look on his face, we were both rather taken aback.

I can see it all now, just like a picture ; the red fire-light from the open stove playing on my old aunt's

brown withered face, that looked just like a queer old oak carving ; the picture of our patron saint upon the wall, the pots and *samovar* (tea urn) on the floor, the great black cross-beams of the roof overhead ; and in the doorway, the Captain in his white uniform, with the black night behind him.

He sat down in the corner, and took me in his lap, but said never a word.

“Be happy, Feodor Ivanovitch !” (Theodore, son of John) said my aunt, wondering more and more ; “may we offer your honour a glass of tea ?”

“It’s not a matter of taking tea now, good mother,” said the Captain sally. “There’s heavy news for you. Your brother, Danilo Timopheievitch, was a good man, and God will be good to him. He has bidden you live long !”*

Martha Timopheievna clasped her hands, and rocked herself to and fro with a low moan.

“It’s God’s will,” she said, “and we must not complain : but eh deary me ! to think of *him*, who was so strong and so brave, being cut off, while a poor useless old woman like me is left living on ! We need strong men who can fight for Father Nikolai Pavlovitch (the Emperor) and Holy Russia—not frail old grandams who can do nothing. Why should the bulrush outlive the oak ?”

* The Russian fashion of announcing a death.

“What’s the matter?” asked I—for I could hardly understand it yet? “Is father dead?”

The Captain drew me closer to him, and gave a nod. And my head fell on his shoulder, and everything seemed to turn cold and empty, just as when you get lost in the snow.

“And who will take me on his knee now?” asked I, looking wistfully up in the Captain’s face.

“*I* will, my brave lad,” answered he, patting me on the shoulder. “Your father gave his life for me, and *I* will be your father henceforth; and if ever I forget you, then may God forget me!”

And then, when I was a little quieter, he told me the whole story; how they had met a band of Kirghiz robbers returning from a foray, and beaten them, and taken back all the plunder; and how, in the thick of the fight, he would have been killed, if my father hadn’t thrown himself in the way, and taken the blow instead; and how he sat down there in the moonlight in the midst of the great waste, with my father’s head on his knee, that he might die easier; and how my father looked-up in his face, and begged him to take care of the little boy at home—and then blessed him and died. But here he broke off suddenly, as if something choked him.

But I scarcely heard what he was saying; for all at

once there came into my mind so many things that I had forgotten—how my father used to carve me little toys with his knife, and carry me down to the river when he was tired, and hungry, and wanting his supper, just that I mightn't lose my bath; and never scolded me when I stayed in too long, and kept him waiting. And it seemed strange to think that I should never sit on his knee again, or feel in his pockets for beads and bits of sugar.

At last I managed to get out one question—

“What became of the man who killed father?”

“Vaska Mardenko* shot him,” answered the Captain, setting his teeth; “don't let's think any more of that. Your father is dead, and buried as a Christian man should be; and God rest his soul.”

“Take me to his grave!” cried I, clasping his arm with both hands.

“I can't, my boy,” said the Captain, shaking his head. “We buried him hastily, in the shifting sand; and no man on earth can tell where he lies.”

“Will God know where to find him, then?” asked I, anxiously.

“Never fear about that, my lad,” answered he, stroking my head: “God knows His children, let them lie

* Cossack names usually end in “ko,” as Polish names do in “ski,” and Russian ones in “off,” or “in.”

where they will. Your father has died like a brave man, and you must live to be such another."

At that there went a kind of glow all through me, as if there were still something worth living for; and everything seemed a little less blank than before.

"Feodor Ivanovitch!" cried I, suddenly, "take me with you on your next expedition, that I may learn to be like my father."

"Time enough for that, my brave boy," said the Captain, with a quiet smile; "a tree does not grow up in one night. You remember the proverb, 'Have patience, Cossack, and thou wilt become Ataman (leader).' What you have to do now is to learn to read and write, and shoot and ride, and speak the languages of the Steppe; and *then* join us, and right glad shall we be to have you. But first *you* must make yourself fit to be one of us. Do you understand?"

"I understand," said I, putting my hand in his; "and, with God's help, I'll do my best!"

Then he kissed my forehead, and I kissed his hand; and that was all that was said about it.

But from that day I went to work with a will; for I never forgot the Captain's words, and he, on his part, took good care to arrange everything for me before he went off again. For he said he wished me to learn just what would be of use to me in after-life; and if all

teaching were done on that plan, there would be fewer fools in the world than there are.

I needed no one to teach me *riding*; for that, thank God, comes to us Cossacks by nature. Even when I was quite a child, whenever there were any horses being led to the water, or driven to pasture outside the town, I never missed a chance of mounting one of them bare-backed, and careering away as long as he liked to carry me. As for going through the drill, and handling lance and carabine, there were lots of old soldiers about the town (invalids, as we call them) ready enough to teach me all they knew; and in a little while I got to be as handy as any of them.

As for the languages of the Steppe, it wasn't difficult to pick up them; for there were always Kirghiz coming into the town, or traders from Samarcand and Bokhara passing through on their way to Orenburg; and as I never lost a chance of talking with them, I soon became fluent enough.

But as for reading and writing, I had to go to Father Arkâdi, the priest, for *that*; for at that time the national schools, which have sprung up since then all over the country like mushrooms, didn't exist. In the days of Nikolai Pavlovitch, things were not as they are now under Alexander Nikolaievitch, whom God preserve! For now-a-days all men are free, and have a chance of

getting on; but *then* twenty-three millions of the Russian people were slaves, and even of those who *were* free, not one in forty could read. Even among us Cossacks (who have never been slaves, and, please God, never will be), there was no thought then of teaching or learning; for in those days nothing was cared for but drilling, and marching, and reviewing; and if a man only knew how to shoulder a musket or handle a pike, that was quite enough. They didn't know then that it's the head, not the hand, that is captain; and that, without the power to think and act for themselves, the strongest men are but as cattle driven to the shambles. And so, because we Russians were too stupid to do anything for ourselves, we had to have our work done for us by a pack of rascally foreigners, who ate our bread, and pocketed our money, and trampled us like dirt under their feet.* I could tell you plenty about that, and all true, too; but it would make my story too long.

And so I worked away, always remembering the Captain's words, and looking forward to the time when I should be able to scour the steppe with my rifle across my shoulders, like a true Cossack. Certainly the read-

* The hatred of the Russians for foreign (more especially German) officials has passed into a proverb. In one of Nicholas Gogol's famous "Cossack Tales" a pious Russian uses the word "German" as a term of abuse to the devil—a rather liberal stretch of patriotic rancour.

ing and writing was hard work ; for my fingers seemed always to turn the wrong way when I tried to hold the pen, and when I ought to have been thinking of my lesson I was wondering how the river would look in the sunshine, and whether the horses would come back from their pasture in time for me to have a ride. But, as we say, "Blow after blow splits the log," and as I went on it got easier ; and I was as proud the first day I read a page of print all by myself, as if they had made me Governor-General of Orenburg.

And so things went on quietly enough till I was ten years old, when there came a change. Aunt Martha made up her mind (and the Captain quite approved of it) to remove to Orenburg ; for, you see, she was a capital hand at basket-making, and there was a great demand for baskets *there*, with so many people continually going off into the steppe, and wanting to carry stores with them. So, one morning when there was a transport-train starting, she got leave for herself and me to perch upon one of the waggons, and for several days we went creeping up and down the Ural Mountains, jolt, jolt, jolt, enough to shake all one's teeth out. Once or twice it was so steep that we had to get out and walk ; and I liked that better, for it was weary work sitting cramped up among the sacks and barrels in the waggon. But the weather was fine, and the

little villages shut in among the great black mountains looked very pretty, and when the waggons halted it was great fun to scramble up the slopes and pick flowers, or bathe in the little streams that ran among the rocks, or eat my dinner upon the dry warm grass, with the blue sky overhead. And so at last we got to Orenburg.

When we got there I thought it the grandest place in the whole world, and was never tired of staring about me. It was nothing like so big *then* as it is now, and lots of things weren't even built then—the factory on the bank of the Ural, and the great Boulevard, and the bridge across the river, and the monument opposite the Governor-General's house, in honour of the Emperor's visit; but to me, who had never seen any place bigger than Orsk, it seemed quite magnificent. The first time I saw the Caravanseraï Square, I made sure that this must be where the Emperor lived, for it looked too big for any one *but* him; and it was not till I got to the outskirts of the town, and saw the little log-huts and unpaved streets that I began to see that, after all, it was only Orsk over again on a much larger scale.

We settled ourselves in a little wooden house not far from the great barrack, and it wasn't long before we got plenty to do, for Martha Timopheievna was a famous workwoman, and I helped her all I could. As

for me, I soon made plenty of friends among the boys of the town, and the old soldiers who had settled down there, and the Kirghiz who came in from the country to buy what they wanted ; so that, altogether, I had a very jolly life of it.

In summer we were out all day long, helping to bring home loads of turf and fire-wood, or hunting for mushrooms, or paddling in the river, or visiting the Kirghiz tents that were dotted by twos and threes together all over the great steppe. These savages made a great pet of me, being pleased at my knowing their language as I did ; and I liked nothing better than to sit cross-legged on a sheet of felt at a tent door, drinking sour milk out of a wooden bowl, while some brown shrivelled old chief, looking just like an over-fried sausage, told me strange tales of the great desert of Kizil-Koum (Red Sand), where you only found water once in two days, and the sand blew in clouds big enough to bury a camel. Little did I think *then* that I should one day know the Kizil-Koum Desert as well as the streets of Orenburg ; but what is to be *will* be.

Then in the winter time we used to make ourselves little sledges of wood, and go flying down the frozen slopes just as the St Petersburgers do on the ice-hills during the carnival. And in the cold stormy evenings, when the Siberian wind came rushing across the great

snow-plain, howling and rattling past the windows like an evil spirit, a lot of us used to get together either at our house or some neighbour's, and cuddle round the warm stove, while I read aloud to them out of a book that Capt. Naprashkin had given me on my "name's day,"* some of our old national stories—how Ilia Murometz conquered the Nightingale Brigand, and how Vaska Bouslaieff broke his neck over the Great Stone of Mount Tabor, and how Yeruslan Lazarevitch found the Talking Head standing alone on the steppe amid the skeletons, and how Oleg the Wise flew to Tsargrad (Constantinople), in the form of a raven, to spy out the tricks of the unbelievers. I remember how they all used to laugh when I came to the story of how Alyosha (Alexey) Popôvitch outwitted Tugârin the Tartar,—

"When they met to fight, then cried Popôvitch, 'Ha! Tugârin, yesterday thou wert for fighting me man to man, and lo! now there stand behind thee champions without number, all against me, Alyosha Popôvitch!' Tugârin turned round to look, and instantly Alyosha cut his head off!"

My old aunt used to sit by at her spinning, listening to it all, and sometimes telling us stories of her own, about the water-nixes who haunt the rivers to drag

* The festival of the Saint after whom one is named.

down fishermen, and the Domovoi (house-spirit) who plays tricks upon the peasants, and the Lyeshi (wood-demon) who raises a storm when he dances in the forests; or else of the deeds of Cossack champions in old times—Yermak Timopheievitch, who conquered Siberia, and Stenka Razin, who became Ataman (captain) of all the country beyond the Volga, and Bogdan Khmelnitski, who rose up against the Poles in 1647, and took all the Ukraine from them, and gave it over to Russia. These were the stories that I liked best to listen to; for *then* I used to think that perhaps I too might one day do something for our father, the Emperor, and Holy Russia.

And sometimes, when the wind was at the loudest, and the great drifts of snow came surging up against the window as if they would bury the house altogether, we would lift up our voices and strike up a jolly song. One time it would be an old Cossack war-song—like this, for instance:—

“ Our horses have trodden the steep Kavkaz (Caucasus),
Of the Crim (Crimea) we have taken our share;
And the way that we went is dappled with blood
To tell that *we* have been there!”*

Another time it would be a snatch from some old

* The rest of this song has unhappily escaped me. I heard it in 1869, at a night-encampment of Cossacks on the Don.

ballad—perhaps Dobrinya Nikeetitch's farewell to his wife, or else Oleg's first speech to his mother :—

“ Now clothe me not, my mother,
In silks that softly fold,
And deck not mine apparel
With silver or with gold ;
And let no brodered kerchief
Around my neck be tied,
And place not on my forehead
The bonnet richly dyed.

“ Clothe me with plates of iron,
And rings of tempered steel,
And let my golden tresses
The cramping helmet feel ;
And place the mace destroying
Within my strong right hand,
And in my wrath resistless
I'll march throughout the land ! ”

But while we were living in this quiet way, great events were occurring all round us, with which I was fated to be mixed up in a way that I little expected.

You've heard of Col. Perovski's expedition against Khiva in November 1839, which broke down through the cold and the depth of the snow? Well, two years after that, Perovski was replaced in the Governor-

Generalship by Obroutscheff, one of the sharpest men we've ever had. *He* saw at once that dragging up great columns all the way from Orenburg to chase the steppe robbers, was like hunting partridges with an elephant; and that the thing to do was to build forts on the steppe itself, and garrison them with Cossacks, so as to have his hand always on the throats of the plunderers. So in 1845 he built Fort Orenburgski on the Turgai river, and Fort Uralsk (which you passed on your way here) upon the Irgiz river. In 1847 he built Fort Raim or Aralsk at the mouth of the Syr-Daria itself (the first hold we ever got on it), and Fort Kos-Aralsk close by; and then, as the distance from Orsk to Fort Uralsk seemed too great, he built Fort Karabutak (the place where you found the young wolf playing with the children) in 1848 as a half-way house. Then he brought over a lot of Cossack families, and settled them round the new forts, till the whole steppe began to be dotted all over with little colonies. And then you see, whenever the Khivaris, or the Kokanese, (who held the whole line of the Syr-Daria in those days), came sniffing about in search of plunder, out darted our garrisons upon them, seizing their camels, cutting off their marauding parties, and destroying their encampments; till at last they began to find their porridge made so hot for them, that they had to behave themselves a bit.

Just about Christmas 1850, when I was nearly fifteen, Captain Naprashkin (he is Major Naprashkin now) came to visit us again, and said that he had been appointed Commandant of this Fort Raim on the Syr-Daria, and was going out there in the spring; and that he had come to town to make his preparations. But it soon appeared that one of those preparations was—to get married! for he had been betrothed to an Orenburg lady for two years past, and when she heard where he was going, she decided (as many a Russian woman has done since then) to go with him, and bear her share of whatever he might meet with.

And a grand festival we made of the marriage-day when it came, I can tell you! Such a giving of presents, and drinking of healths, and wishing of good wishes, as you never saw in your life. When the crowns were put on their heads,* old Martha Timopheievna fairly sobbed aloud; and she gave the Major a scarf worked with her own hands, which he wore ever after.

But from that day forth (as if her work were now done) the poor old woman got weaker and weaker, like a lamp burning down; and just about the middle of February, when the winter was at its worst, she died. But at her death a strange thing happened.

* From this custom comes the Russian phrase for marriage—"to go under the crown."

She had been lying all morning quite still, so that once or twice I had to look closely to make sure that she was alive. All on a sudden, she rose up in the bed like a corpse rising out of its grave, and looked with her great hollow eyes at the opposite wall, as if she saw something that I couldn't see; and then she spoke, in a deep, strong voice, that sounded just like some one else speaking *through her* :—

“Remember always that God has ordained thee to be the scourge of the unbelievers, not their friend. Never love a heathen woman, and never bow down to a heathen god!”

The day came when I had good cause to remember her words; but at the time I just thought she was raving, and took no heed. And so she died.

Some of the gossips said it was an ill omen for a funeral to come so soon after a wedding, and that it boded the Major no good; but I never minded them. For, since I had heard where our Major was going, I could think of nothing but going with him, and becoming a soldier in earnest. I asked him, and he agreed at once, and got me enrolled on the spot. But, though he *was* my friend, he gave me just the same place as any other private soldier, and left it to *me* to show whether I had more in me than the rest. And that was just what I liked; for I didn't want to be

lifted over the heads of older and better men than myself, just because a great man had taken a fancy to me. Fair play above all, say I.

Well, the spring came at last, and off we started. I needn't describe the journey, since you've been over it all yourself; but I fancy you had better weather than *we* had. It was just the turn of the season, and the snow was melted, and the whole country like a dish of cabbage-soup; and the rain kept falling, falling night and day, so that altogether we were no better off than a peasant on the Volga in flood-time. The store-waggons were a terrible bother; they stuck fast at every turn, and we had to be always jumping down and dragging them up out of the mud by main force; and what with the wet, and the dirt, and the cold winds, and the want of fire, we had a nice time of it. Aye, it was rough work for any man, let alone a woman; but the way the Major's wife stood it, was an example to us all. She was such a quiet, delicate-looking little thing, that you'd have thought a puff of wind could blow her away; but I tell you, she faced it like an old soldier. There she sat in the corner of a cart, with an old ragged tilt over her, through which the rain dripped in spite of all we could do; but she just shook the wet off her clothes, and laughed merrily, and said that if

she hadn't stood fire, she had stood plenty of water, and that was nearly as bad! And then, instead of taking pleasure in being served and giving as much trouble as possible (like many ladies I've known), she did all she could for herself, so as to spare us; and when we would insist upon helping her (for there wasn't a man of us but was right glad to do it), she just smiled and said in her pleasant way, "It's very good of you to take so much trouble for a non-combatant!" I tell you, if there had been but one such woman with Perovski's expedition, it would have got to Khiva after all!

We halted a day at Fort Karabutak, and had a grand jollification in the queer little crow's nest, up there on its bare ridge in the midst of the enormous steppes, just as if it had lost its way. It was lonely enough then, for the post between it and Orsk wasn't established till 1858, and there were only four houses there beside the fort itself. We made another halt at Uralsk, and then pushed straight on—as well we might, for from Uralsk to the Syr-Daria, there is neither town, village, nor anything else.

As we got farther south, we began to get into the region of fine weather; and then the march became very jolly. When we first came in sight of the Aral Sea at Ak-Djulpas, the blue water looked so bright

and sparkling in the sunshine, and the great rocks away to the west made such a brave show against the clear morning sky, that I could hardly believe that this was the terrible desolate place that I had heard so many stories about. Now, too, the earth being dry, we got on faster; and at last, one fine May morning, we saw in the distance a low, grey bank standing out against the sky, with a shining streak just beyond it. The grey bank was the wall of Fort Raim;* the shining streak was the Syr-Daria.

And now began a new life for us all. You would think, no doubt, that being shut up this way in the heart of the desert would make us dumpish and chop-fallen, and as solemn as monks in a monastery; but not a bit of it. Our separation from all the rest of the world seemed only to draw us closer together, and make us more like brothers; and our Major was never tired of finding amusement for us when we were off duty. Before we had been there a month, he had rigged up some fishing tackle, and set a lot of us fishing all the summer through, so as to have a stock of dried provisions ready against the winter. Then he set a lot more to dig cabbage-gardens along the bank, that we

* This fort and that of Kos-Aralsk were abandoned in 1854-5, Russia's hold on the Syr-Daria being secured.

might have wherewithal to make our *shitchee* (cabbage-soup). The rest of us had enough to do in fixing up our summer quarters—little shanties of reed-matting, with windows of thin gauze instead of glass, on the steppe outside the fort ; and I can tell you, though the mosquitoes bothered us a good deal, it was very jolly living there in the fine warm weather, when the days were long.

In the evening we used to have our *samovar* out on the grass, and sit round it talking over old times ; and sometimes the Major would come and try a sip of our tea, and say a kind word to us all—he was always good at that, God bless him ! And then old Sergeant Kôkereff (who was handy at everything) would bring out his *skribka** and play a rollicking tune, while we danced our Cossack dance to it, and the Major and his wife sat and looked on. And then the Kirghiz and Bashkirs used to come up to the fort to trade, or to pasture their flocks on the grass by the river ; and the sailors from the *Nikolai* and *Konstantin*, our two steamers on the Aral Sea, paid us a visit now and then between their cruises, so that altogether we had plenty to amuse us.

Then in the winter time, when the river was frozen over for three months, and the snow lay too deep for us

* A kind of banjo, making very tolerable music.

to get about, we had plenty to do cleaning our arms, and shovelling the barrack-yard clear of snow, and mending the breaches that the frost made in the walls, and chopping wood for firing, and what not. And in the long evenings we used to sit round the *peetch* (stove) and tell stories, just as I and my play-fellows had done at Orenburg, when I was a child. And on the night of Rojdestvo (Christmas) we got up a regular play, with hangings, and a curtain and music, and all, just like a real theatre; and Sergeant Kôkereff and I took the two leading parts, and the Major and his wife and the other officers looked on; and after it was done the Major thanked the performers, and gave them a rouble apiece all round, so that the whole thing went off very well.

But *the* day of all was the day that little Lënotchka,* the Major's daughter, was born. The major gave us a double ration of *vodka* all round in honour of the occasion; but we were all so afraid of disturbing the Bârinia (Madame) that we stole out of the fort as quiet as mice, and went away out on the steppe, where the noise of our merry-making couldn't reach her. And we drank the Major's health, and Madame's, and the little lady's, and long life to them all—till, when we came back, some of us saw five different doors into the fort, and none of them the right one.

* Diminutive of Elêna.

The Major was so proud of his little lady, that directly the christening was over he brought her out in his arms, and showed her to us all ; and before she was a year old, he had the Russian Double-Eagle flourished on her arm in gunpowder , and though she cried a bit at the time, she got to be quite proud of it after a while, and was always pulling up her little bit of a sleeve, to show the mark.

And what a pet we did make of her, to be sure ! Soldiers and sailors are all alike in that way : they must make a pet of something, if it's only a bird or a kitten—let alone a child. There used to be quite a fight who should give her bits of sugar, and plait her reed-baskets or chains of flowers ; and every day one or other of us would petition to be allowed to carry her round the barrack-yard, with all the rest following like an Easter procession. Many and many a time have I trotted up and down the yard a dozen times at a stretch, with the little thing perched on my shoulder, laughing and crowing with delight ; and when I stopped, she would stroke my cheek with her little velvety hand, and say, "Pai, pai ! " *

Ah ! it was a pleasant time ; and I only wish it could have lasted longer. But what is to be *will* be ; and no man can avoid his fate.

* A child's word for "good" in Russian, just as "beh, beh," is "bad."

It was in the beginning of April 1853 (I remember *that* date well, though I've forgotten most others) that Stepan Goorko, Nikolai Obvertisheff, and I crossed the river to pay a visit to a Kirghiz *aoul* (encampment) on the left bank, and try to persuade them to shift over to our side. For, you see, what with our fort of Raim, and what with the new one that had just been built at Kazalinsk, our bank was quiet enough; but on the left bank the Kokanese and Turkomans were quite at home, and did what they liked. As yet they had never come so far down the river as where this old chief's encampment was; but we were sure they must have got their eye on him, and so we wanted him to come over to us—more especially as, with all his live stock, he would be a good neighbour in case we ran short of provisions.

We found the old boy sitting at his tent-door, and got a hearty welcome. He spread a raw sheepskin for us to sit down upon, and brought us out a huge bowl of sour milk; and gave me his own wooden spoon as a special favour, licking it clean first by way of doing me honour. And Obvertisheff pulled out a packet of tea for him, and I a roll of tobacco; and there we sat chatting till the sun began to go down.

At first he seemed in no humour to follow our counsel, saying that he was very well where he was

(just like an Asiatic!) But when I told him of all that he would get by trading with us, and hinted at more tea and tobacco if he did the right thing, he began to give way.

"So be it," said he at last; "I'll come over *to-morrow*."

The word was hardly out, when Stepan Goorko started up, and cried out, "What's that?" and suddenly, from the distance, we all heard a strange, dull sound, like a waggon rolling over planks. It came louder, and nearer, and plainer, and all at once, like the surge of a wave, burst up over the low ridge behind us a troop of horsemen, whose black caps and long lean faces told us directly who they were.

"Caught!" shouted Stepan, snatching up his rifle. "Let's have life for life, boys!" and he fired right into the throng. The foremost horseman threw up his arms, and came headlong down over his horse's neck, like one diving; but the rest plunged right upon us. There was a flash and a crackle of carabines, and poor Stepan dropped dead at my feet, splashing my face with his blood. And after that I only remember smashing right and left with my clubbed rifle, amid a whirl of black faces and grinning teeth, and seeing Obvertisheff fall with two or three of them upon him, and the old chief roll over with a broken spear in his side; and

then something came down upon my head like the fall of a heavy log, and down I went as if I were dead.

When I came to myself again, it was black night, and I could just make out a great waste of dark steppe, with something shimmering in the midst of it, like the water of a lake.* Little by little I made out that I was tied hard and fast on a camel, and all round me were mounted men, whose lances glimmered faintly against the sky. My head ached frightfully; and by a cold, sticky feeling all over my face and hair, I judged that I had bled a good deal. At first I could hardly make out what had happened; but presently I heard a muttering among my guards, and the word "Urgendj" (Khiva) repeated again and again.

Then I saw it all clear. I was in the hands of the Turkomans, and they were carrying me to Khiva, to sell me for a slave.

* Probably Lake Alambai,—10 miles south of the Syr-Daria.

CHAPTER III.

IN KHIVA.

WHAT happened after that I can't tell you; for when I try to remember it, it comes back to me all blurred and hazy, like a line of country seen through driving rain. I can just recal a sort of nightmare of flat, endless sand, which seemed to go on and on for ever under the burning sky—no shade, no wind, no freshness, but all red-hot together. Then, in the middle of this, I have a kind of vision of camels strung together in long single file, going silently onward, and the Turkomans flitting about on their wiry little horses, with their dark faces, and grinning teeth, and glittering eyes, like so many evil spirits.

But the only thing I remember plainly is lying bound on the back of a camel, with the seesaw motion making me sick, and the cords cutting my wrists and ankles, and my lips cracked and bleeding with thirst, and the skin peeling off my face, and my blood burning with fever, till every limb seemed a separate pain. At last it all melted into a kind of drowsiness, half-sleeping and half-dying, in which I had a dull consciousness of

pain and misery, without strength enough to rouse up and think what it was all about. A little more of *that*, I think, would have ended me altogether.

But I was not to end so. One morning I woke up as if from a swoon, with a feeling of life and freshness such as I had not felt for long, long. I found that I had been untied and laid on the ground, and that some one (my eyes were so sore that I could not see who) was pouring water into my mouth. Presently I was able to sit up and look about me, and then I saw *grass* under me instead of sand, and tents dotted all about, and a lot of long, gaunt, ragged, scarecrow-looking fellows, who evidently didn't belong to *our* party, lounging about in fur caps or great shapeless bonnets of felt.

This was a band of Kirghiz on their way north: for what we call the "wandering Kirghiz" migrate like the swallows—south in winter, and north again in summer; and these fellows were moving up to the Syr-Daria to pasture their flocks, and trade a bit with our garrisons. They had been encamped here for two days, round the Well of Irkibai (the same place where the Kazalinsk column built a fort on their march last spring, when judgment overtook the Khivans for all their rascalities), and now they were just getting ready to move again.

Well, the Turkomans watered their beasts, and

lighted little fires of dried grass and camel-dung, and knocked bits off their "brick-tea," which they boiled down in their little camp-kettles; and then, squatting round the fires, they began drinking and talking.

From their talk I made out (for they never dreamed of my understanding them) that they had heard of me from the Kirghiz who traded with us, and took me for the Major's son or near relation; and therefore they had spared my life, hoping either to get a good ransom for me, or to sell me at a high price in Khiva.

As for poor Obvertisheff, I never heard what became of him, but I can guess; for when the Khan sent back our prisoners to Kazalinsk last April, and Alexey Obvertisheff came to ask for his brother, there was no answer. And that was the end of many a brave fellow who vanished from among us as if the earth had swallowed him, and whose friends, after watching and waiting many a weary year, were forced at length to give him up for lost. Aye, we owe a heavy debt to those man-stealing villains; but I think I've pretty well paid mine.

It was a sight to see the Turkomans and the Kirghiz together that day. It was just the wolf and the wolf-hound over again; the Kirghiz slouching and slinking, with his sharp muzzle and small cunning eyes—the Turkoman standing over him like a tower, drawn up to

his full height, with his swaggering stride and bold defiant look, as if the whole earth belonged to him. Bad as the Turkoman is—robber, liar, cut-throat, man-stealer from his very birth—he's a born warrior; and when I had to deal with them in after days, it was as different from slaughtering cowards like the Kirghiz and Kokanese, as felling timber is from mowing grass.

The next morning the Kirghiz were gone; but there happened *one* thing before they left which is worth telling. I was lying on the grass stiff and sore, and still 'parched with thirst—for I need not tell *you*, who have felt the desert-fever yourself, that a river would hardly quench it when it's once upon you—when a Kirghiz woman came by with a jar of milk—a poor, thin, jaded creature, who had evidently been sorely ill-used. When she saw me lying there, she said gently, "Perhaps thou too hast a mother, and Allah will remember the merciful;" and then she put the jar to my lips, and gave me a long drink.

You'd laugh if I told you how that trifle lifted up my heart; but when a man is at the lowest, even a trifle seems much to him. I just said to myself, "There is kindness even among the heathen, and God has not forsaken me yet!" and from that moment I felt sure that I should pull through somehow or other. Then, for the first time since my capture, I prayed—just as I

had done at home in the old days, with my father's arm round my neck. It seemed strange to be praying the same old prayers in the heart of this dreary waste, which God Himself seemed to have forgotten ; but I'll be bound He heard me, for all that.

I needn't go into the rest of our journey, for it would only bore you. It was easier work after this ; for the Turkomans, being now safe from pursuit, travelled slower, and only at night, to spare the beasts they had taken ; but, even so, we had a hard time of it. The whole country was a waste of sand or parched clay, cut up by dry water-courses, and banked into great hummocks, just like the knuckles of one's hand. And it was all foot-work with me now, too ; for the minute they saw I was able to walk, they made me trudge alongside of one of them, with my right hand tied to his saddle ; and whenever I lagged, he used to give me a whack with his spear-shaft, or perhaps a prod with the point, to freshen me up a bit. The other prisoners fared even worse ; and a little after we left Irkibai, one or two of the women fairly broke down. So the Turkomans just cut them adrift, and left them to die ; and the look of their eyes as they watched us leaving them stuck in my head for weeks after. I've hardly forgotten it yet.

However, through it all I kept watching the lie of the country, and marking all the ins and outs of it in my own mind, in case I should ever have a chance of escaping; and, with what I saw myself, and what I picked up from the talk of the robbers, I think I have our route pretty pat. Here it is on the map, you see (and the Captain produces the great four-sheet Russian map of Central Asia, a copy of which, if he but knew it, lies hidden, sorely tattered and travel-stained, in my haversack).* “Here, you see, is Irkibai, half-way from the Syr-Daria to the Amu-Daria (Oxus), with the ruins of an old fort a little to the east, which we saw on the left as we passed. There’s the place where we crossed the channel of the Djani-Daria, just like a great dry ditch of baked clay. Then we kept on to the south-west, past these two little lakes (we camped beside one of them, and the camels all rushed in like mad, fighting for the first drink), and so down upon the Sheikh-Djeli mountains, which run along the right bank of the Oxus.

Well do I remember the time when we came in sight of them. First, a blue cloud hanging in the distant sky; then a waving line of dark purple, flecked with yellow every here and there; and then the great mountains themselves, with a broad sweep of green plain at their feet, which was very pleasant to see after the hot

* This map is still in my possession.

brassy desert. The very sight of it seemed to freshen up our whole party; and even the camels quickened their pace, and stretched their long necks forward, as if knowing that they were nearing the end at last. Just about sunset, after a long zig-zag up the mountain-side, we reached the crown of the pass, and looked down upon a sight which I did not soon forget.

Behind us lay the great desert that we had passed, looking vaster and drearier than ever in the gathering dimness of night. Overhead, the huge peaks rose up hundreds of feet into the air, like the wall of a fortress (they're a good two thousand feet at the highest), every point and rock tipped with fire. Right under our feet lay the whole breadth of the Oxus (very nearly a mile across), one great sheet of fire under the red sun, with scores of tiny boats flitting over it like flies; and the shrill cries of the boatmen came faintly up to us through the still air. The opposite bank was one mass of green leaves, clustered together, dark green and light green,—gardens, vineyards, melon-patches, apricot-plantations,—as far as eye could reach; and out of it rose like an island a great white dome, crowning a wall of enamelled tiles, which shone in the sun like rainbows. This was the great college of Kiptchak, a famous place in its way; for, Kiptchak being one of the sacred towns of Khiva, pilgrims come from all parts of the Khanate to

see the college and worship in the mosque, just like our peasants to Kiev and Jerusalem.

Now, as you may think, it was too late to ferry us all over that evening ; for a caravan with many beasts in it often takes twelve hours to cross ; so the chief said *he* would cross with me and two or three of the prisoners, leaving the rest of his band to bring over the beasts in the morning. We got into a great, heavy, flat-bottomed boat (like one of our Volga wood-barges, only smaller), and over we went. When we got across, there was a great crowd and bustle on the bank, and in the middle of it a big barge, curiously ornamented, with about a dozen soldiers in it, armed with matchlocks and yataghans (sabres) and all in tunics of crimson silk. In the stern, under a kind of awning, sat an old man, very richly dressed, with a long grey beard. I saw at once that he must be some great man, by the fuss they made over him ; but what was my surprise when, after looking hard at our party for a minute or two, he pointed his finger at *me*, and whispered to one of his servants, who instantly stepped up to us, and, taking hold of me and the Turkoman chief, said, "My master would speak with you!"

The Turkoman's eyes sparkled at the prospect of a bargain, and he stepped briskly forward to the old gentleman, who, after looking me well over from head

to foot, began whispering with him. I could see (though I didn't hear what they said) that there was hot bargaining between them ; but I soon saw that the old gentleman had the best of it, and before long I found myself handed over to him, and saw the Turkoman counting his money.

Then I bethought myself of a trick to play him. I knew that if the chief had had any idea that I spoke the language of the country, he'd have asked thrice what he did ; so, as he turned to go, I said to him in *their* tongue, "Farewell, brother ! may Allah prosper thy homeward journey !"

Talk of a picture ! I wish I *could* have sketched the fellow's face when he heard me ! His eyes nearly started out of his head, and his jaw dropped like a dog that has lost its dinner.

"A thousand plagues on you, unbelieving dog !" howled he, "why didn't you tell me you could speak our language ?"

"Knowest thou not," answered I solemnly, "that the wise man has said, 'He who tells the truth to his enemy is a fool.' Farewell ! may Allah grant thee to escape the Yomouds !"

This was the worst insult I could offer him ; for the Yomouds are a quiet easy-going tribe,* and he was a

* Lying between the Attreck and the Caspian.

Tchodor of the Ust-Urt, one of the fiercest races in Central Asia ; so that it was just like bidding a wolf beware of a sheep. O ! he *was* in a rage, if you like ! He gnashed his teeth, and rent his clothes (which were quite ragged enough already), and stamped his feet, and cursed my forefathers to the fifth generation, and finally went off looking as chopfallen as if he'd had nothing to eat for a fortnight.

As for the old Khivan grandee, he laughed fit to choke himself (for nothing pleases an Asiatic like a little bit of roguery), and swore that I was well worth my price.

“Take him with you,” said he to his servants, “and give him food. To-morrow he shall go up the river with us.”

All was done as he commanded ; and next morning, after a good nap and a good feed, and a bath in the river, and putting on a blue robe and white turban in place of my old rags, I felt quite another man, and ready for anything.

Being towed with a rope by men who didn't overwork themselves, we went slowly enough (I've heard that to go by barge up the Oxus from Kungrad to Khiva, which is only one hundred and ninety-seven miles, takes eighteen days !), but that gave me more time to look about ; and there was plenty to look at. From

Kiptchak right up to Mangit, the Sheikh-Djeli range stood over the river like a wall, dark purple and green in the shadow, turning to bright yellow wherever the sun caught it. In these hills they used to find gold and copper, but their clumsy way of working cost so much that it hasn't been touched for more than fifty years; they get nothing but nitre and sulphur there now.

Here and there along the bank we came upon little encampments of Karakalpaks (black caps), of whom it is said that their women are the greatest beauties, and their men the greatest fools in all Asia; and it's just about true, too, by my experience. Many of the women crowded to look at us (and to show off their red shawls), and one or two even exchanged some chaff with the towing party, which, whatever it was, raised great laughter. I noticed that several of the men wore rings in their nostrils, and seemed very proud of them.

After we passed Mangit (the place where our Orenburg column made such a slaughter on its way to Khiva last spring), the hills got lower, and turned away from the bank, which became suddenly flat, and covered with huge reeds, rising above our heads even when we stood up, so that once or twice the barge could hardly get along. I got tired with seeing the lubbers of barge-men pretending to pull, and begged my master to let *me* take a spell. The old man stared.

"You're the first slave I ever had that asked leave to *work*," said he with a grin ; "but you may try."

To work I went, and soon showed 'em the difference ; for I had often helped our Boorlaks (barges) at home, and knew how to do it. As I pulled, I kept time with a song, in the Russian fashion ; and then the Khivans pricked their ears, for they're all passionately fond of music, and, through all Central Asia, any good music is called Urgendji (Khivan). Presently my master called me.

"Sing me that over again," said he ; "it must be worth hearing."

There was a balaleika (banjo) lying beside him ; I took it up, strummed a `bit, and struck up. The old fellow was delighted.

"You're a treasure !" he cried, "and that Turkoman has eaten dirt, and befouled his face before men." (Here he grinned again, for my having taken in the Turkoman seemed a never-ending treat to him.) "Can you handle sword and gun as well as barge-rope and balaleika ?"

"If it please Allah," answered I respectfully, "my lord shall not be ashamed of his servant."

"Good," said he ; "when we get to Khiva, you shall teach my sons to shoot—I wish to make men of them."

The next morning we passed Goorlen, the best place

for melons in the whole Khanate, and so buried in gardens that you can hardly see it from the river. Then, after a bit, came the mouth of the canal leading to Urgendj (I remember there was a burial-ground close to it), and a little higher up we left the river and turned into a network of canals, with little bridges over them every here and there. And now the country appeared at its best; for the soil round Khiva is the best in the whole Khanate, and corn-fields, fruit-orchards, gardens, and grass meadows dotted with grazing cattle, followed each other as thick as flies on sugar. In many places the boughs overhung the water, and the Uzbeks came out of their little reed-thatched huts to stare at us; till at last, one bright warm afternoon, we halted at a flight of steps leading up from the water to a little gate in a high wall of baked earth—and there we were at our journey's end.

And now, of course, you'll expect me to describe Khiva; but, in reality, there's very little to describe. You remember what you told me last night about Jerusalem—that it's a pig-sty in a Paradise? well, that's just what Khiva is, too. It's an overgrown village of one-storeyed mud-hovels, with narrow, crooked, filthy streets, a foot deep with dust in dry weather, and a foot deep with mud in wet. When you get to Khiva, if you

take my advice, you'll take a good look at the outskirts, and leave the town alone altogether.

The town itself is defended by a wall of baked earth, four miles round, and about double the height of a man as I should guess it. Every here and there, great bulging round towers stick out like barrels, and there were a few old rusty guns on them in my time—but catch anybody trying to fire them off! and as for the wall itself, you might have *sneezed* it down any day you liked. The space covered by the plantations (for beside the parks of the grandees, almost every hovel has a little patch of garden before it) makes the town look bigger than it is; but in my time, so far as I could find out, there were only 15,000 people there altogether—I suppose the Khan had killed all the rest.

In the middle of the town stands the citadel, with a wall a mile round. Inside it are most of the public buildings, as well as the Khan's palace and gardens, which were kept in order by Persian and Russian slaves. From a distance, with all its domes and towers glittering in the sunshine above the great sea of green leaves, the whole place looked pretty enough; but when you got closer, it was a *very* different thing.

My master kept his word about my teaching his sons to shoot, and the day after my arrival I was introduced

to my precious pupils. And a nice pair they were—fat, pasty, no-backbone sort of fellows, with eyes like stewed prunes, and limbs straggling like the legs of a horse on the ice. Add to this, that they handled a gun like a broomstick, and had as much idea of taking aim as a pig has of doing sums—and you may think what a job I was likely to have of it. However, it was easy work, so I didn't much mind; and then my master used to make me sing and play to him and his guests while they were at dinner, and send me food from his own table, and what not; so I hadn't a bad life of it on the whole.

But as for the other slaves, who worked in the garden, it was pitiful to see how *they* were ill-used—especially the Persians. The overlookers just knocked them about like dogs, and fed them badly into the bargain, which always takes the steel out of a man. But the Russians fared little better. There was one man (a Russian peasant by the look of him) whom I pitied most, because he was getting old and stiff, and past work. I used to bring him scraps of food on the sly, and comforted him all I could; but the poor fellow only shook his head, and muttered between his teeth, "I can't bear it; I *must* end it soon!"

And he *did*—sooner than I expected. I was going through the garden one evening, when I saw an over-

seer strike this fellow across the shoulders, just where the sun had burned his skin into a sore. Up went the Russian's spade like lightning, and down it came on the Khivan's forehead with a smash that echoed all round the garden. The skull gave in like pie-crust, and the wood flew in splinters all over the place; and down dropped the man dead, without a cry.

Then began such an uproar as never was; and the other overseers rushed in and cut the Russian down, and were hacking him as he lay, when all at once there was a dead silence, and there stood our master.

"What's the matter?"

They told him, all speaking at once.

"Is that all? I'll teach you to disturb me for nothing. Pitch the fellow away somewhere; he's no great loss, for he was getting old anyhow."

They flung the Russian into a shed, and then went off; and in five minutes the garden was empty. But I, seeing no one looking, tried to bandage his wounds, and, finding that no use, I sat down to watch till he died.

Night was coming on; and a dreary thing it was to sit there in the utter silence with the dying man's head upon my knees, listening to his faint breathing, and watching the darkness deepen round us, till the cold

moon came creeping up over the tree-tops, staring down at us both, and making the white still face look more ghastly than ever.

Suddenly he opened his eyes, and raised his head as if listening.

"They're coming!" said he in a hoarse whisper, which seemed to come from an infinite distance, though every word was perfectly distinct. "They're coming at last! Hear the tramp of their feet and the rumble of their wheels! Woe to the unbelievers now—woe!"

I stared at him in amazement. Everything was as still as death, and yet he spoke just as if he really heard it all.

"Hear the sound of the cannon!" he went on after a moment's pause. "Fire away, lads! See how the wall crumbles and great pieces of it come rolling down! There go our lads to the assault,—up go the white jackets and bright bayonets, and the heathen dogs are fleeing before them. Well done! they're in, they're in! and there goes the general himself—that little man on horseback, with the round head and bald forehead and the thick moustache. Hurrah! the town's taken, and up goes the Russian flag over their thieves' nest! Glory to God! Hurrah!"

The whole place echoed with his shout as he sprang to his feet and waved his arms in triumph—and

then, without moan or shudder, dropped dead at my feet.

It was the 29th May* 1853. On the 29th May 1873 our men marched into Khiva; and every word that he had spoken was fulfilled to the letter.

* June 10th by our reckoning, the Russians using the Old Style.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHANGE OF MASTERS.

FOR some time after this I met with no adventures worth talking about; and my life, barring the bother of teaching a couple of lubbers who didn't know their right hand from their left, was easy enough. Indeed some people would have said that I was more comfortable here than on outpost duty upon the Syr-Daria; but then I was a *slave*—that made all the difference. At Fort Raim I was just as much under orders and tied to one place; but it's one thing to be commanded by one's own brothers and fellow Christians, men who can work and who can fight—and another thing to be ordered about by heathen rascals, who run away if they hear a cat sneeze. So I determined to escape the moment I got the least chance, and meanwhile I picked up all the information I could; for the unlikeliest thing may be of use some day, and a man can't be too wide awake in a strange country.

Khiva was always a great place for trade, in spite of its being so shut in by deserts; and when I was there it had a famous traffic with every part of Central Asia.

The trade with Astrakhan by way of Mangishlak had, it's true, begun to fall off, and ceased altogether two years later ; but along all the other routes, to Bokhara, to Tashkent, to Persia by way of Meshed, to Orenburg both by the eastern and western shores of the Aral Sea—caravans went continually, and even to Astrabad on the Caspian every now and then. Some say that, now we've taken Khiva, the trade will fall off ; don't you believe a word of it. The trade in *slaves* will, and so much the better ; but as for goods, when people find that they can send their merchandise about without fear of its being plundered on the way, they'll send more than ever.

I was a good deal about in these days attending on my master, who was what we would call Minister of the Interior, and a great favourite with the Khan. Whenever advice was needed about anything, the Khan always sent for him ; and as no Asiatic grandee ever thinks of going anywhere without at least a dozen servants to clear his way, I and the rest followed him wherever he went, so that I saw a good deal of the town.

The prettiest bits about it, certainly, were the courts of the mosques, with a great tank of water in the centre, and trees planted all round, and the people sitting under them in groups, with clothes of every possible

bright colour, talking or telling stories. Some of the colleges, too, were nicely built, though the fellows who went to them didn't look good for much ; I suppose it was as the old saying goes, "The more colleges, the fewer scholars." I was told that in the town of Khiva alone there are 22 colleges, 17 mosques, and 260 shops ; and in the whole Khanate 60 colleges, ranging from 20 to 60 students apiece.

But the bazaars were what *I* liked best, with all the queer medley of people in them. There were the Uzbeks, large-jointed, low-browed, narrow-eyed, beardless fellows, in nothing but a fur cap, a shirt, and a pair of boots, which is quite full dress in Khiva ; and the half-naked dervishes, all over dirt and vermin, flourishing their arms like the sails of a windmill, and yelling out scraps of the Koran ; and the Teke-Turkomans from the great southern desert, with their long sinewy limbs, and hooked noses, and great black eyes ; and the high-cheeked Persian slaves, silent and melancholy, with fetters clinking at their ankles ; and the fat, jolly-looking merchants from Kokan and Bokhara, with huge turbans and flowing beards, and robes put one over the other like the leaves of a cabbage ; while every now and then some officer of the Court would come past, with a dozen fierce-looking fellows in front of him, shouting and clearing the way ; or else a file of

loaded camels, or a native cart with wheels a *sajen* (7 ft.) broad, making a hole in the crowd like hot water thrown upon snow.

Then to see, the shopmen, sitting each in his little booth, just like a rat in a trap—some of them screaming after everybody that passed, others coiled up lazily as if they didn't care a bit whether anybody bought or not. It was just as if some one had shut up a thousand men in a thousand boxes, and then taken one side off and left the men sitting in 'em. And the heat! and the dust! and the smells! and the noise! but there, you know what a bazaar is without *my* telling.

It was like meeting old friends again to see so many Russian samovars (tea-urns) about, but they were none too many, for such fellows to drink tea you never saw in your life. Old Praskovia Sokoloff, our next neighbour at Orenburg, used to drink a samovar and a half to her own share—but these Khivans could have done three or four easily. Then, too, their's was *green* tea, and they drank it in what they call "Mogul fashion," in great wooden bowls, without sugar, and mixed with salt, grease, and cinnamon. When it was too hot they shook it till it cooled; and I've seen some of the chiefs, after drinking a bowl nearly dry, kindly pass the slops to their subordinates. I remember when I told that story in Moscow the other day, some one said that the

heads of our public offices do just the same thing; but I suppose he was joking, for I never saw them.

It was in one of these walks through the town that I met with an adventure, and not a very pleasant one either. My master had gone to visit some other big-wig in the town, and left a lot of us kicking our heels at the door, or rather garden-gate; so I thought I might just as well look about me a little, and I sauntered round a corner, and then round another, looking at this thing and that thing—till, all at once, I found I had lost my way.

Now this by itself would have been bad enough—for trying to find your way in Khiva is like going back to look for your pipe in a forest. But, unluckily, this wasn't all, for as I stood staring about I attracted the attention of a dervish who was capering about like a scalded cat. The moment he clapped eyes on me he knew me for a Russian (these rascals have the eye of a hungry wolf for any kind of mischief), flew at me, clawed off my turban with one hand, and hit me a whack in the face with the other, bellowing out, "Death to all unbelievers!"

In a moment the whole place was up, one yelling louder than another,—

"An Oorooss! (Russian) an infidel!"

"May dogs defile the grave of his father!"

“Strike him down! trample him under foot!”

And tiles and lumps of dirt (luckily there are no *stones* in Khiva) began to fly thick as hail. I set my back to a wall, snatched up a broken pole that I saw lying, and stood at bay. The foremost of the crowd swayed back, but the fellows behind kept shying potsherds and knobs of hard clay, and matters were beginning to look serious, when suddenly there was a cry of “Make way!” and the crowd parted like a breaking snowdrift, and I found myself facing a short broad-shouldered man in an embroidered robe, with half-a-dozen soldiers about him.

“What means this?” shouted he.

“Justice, my lord!” cried I, taking hold of the hem of his robe; “where is it written that many should fall upon one?”

He gave me a look as sharp as a needle, and then turned round to the mob and cried, “What are you doing with this fellow? don’t you see he’s a servant of the Khan? Be off with you!”

The street was clear in a jiffy (the name of the Khan was quite enough for that), and then my new acquaintance came close to me and whispered in *Russian*,—

“Best be off, my lad, while the ground’s clear, for we Russians are no favourites hereabouts. I’ll send one of my men with you to take you wherever you’re going.”

"And who are you?" asked I, staring.

"My name's Nikolai Ivanovitch Arsheenoff, sailor of the Caspian flotilla. I got into a row with my captain while we were at Astrakhan, and knocked him down; so I had to run for it. I got over here by way of Gourieff* and the Ust-Urt; and as I know something of working guns, they've made me Chief of the Artillery. Good-bye; God be with you!"

And off he went. Had any one told me at that moment how and where our next meeting was to be, I *should* have opened my eyes a little.

About four months after my arrival, as near as I can guess (for by this time I'd quite lost our reckoning, and got into the Mohammedan one), my master went down to Kungrad to inspect the fortifications, and see that all was right with the dykes that had been raised here and there to shallow the river, and keep our Aral flotilla from getting up it. Not that they need have taken the trouble, for in many places it's only three feet deep, and in autumn, when the water sinks, little more than one.

The voyage down stream was quick work (four days from Khiva to Kungrad), but nothing like so pleasant as the coming up from Kiptchak. For after we lost sight of the Sheikh-Djeli Mountains (which was just

* A town at the mouth of the Ural river.

before passing a little mud fortress called Bend, on the left bank), the banks on either side got flat and clayey, and there was nothing to look at. From the town of Khodjeili the real Delta, as they call it, began—a great waste of soft wet soil, cut up by ditches, and canals, and water-courses, that seemed to go nowhere and end in nothing—while the river itself was choked by a perfect forest of enormous reeds, some of which, as I measured them, were good four sajens (twenty-eight feet) high. As for the mosquitoes, there's no describing them—you couldn't draw breath without swallowing a dozen; and the flies came down upon us in such clouds, that we looked just like slices of brown bread spread with currants.

However, at last we got to Kungrad; and a queer place I found it. From a distance it looked (as most Asiatic towns do) just like a heap of ruins; and when you got into it, it was just Khiva over again—the same low mud houses and flat roofs, the same narrow, dirty streets, the same dust, and heat, and flies, and constant whirl of coloured dresses. The head of the town police came down with some of his men to meet my master, and cleared the way by cutting every one across the face with a horsewhip that came too near—which seems to be the correct thing in these parts.

We stayed there some time, but I didn't see much of

the place ; for my master never let me out alone, fearing that I might escape ; and indeed, if I could have got hold of a boat, I'd have pushed down stream into the Aral Sea, and taken my chance of falling in with our flotilla, or working across to the mouth of the Syr-Daria. But, as you see, I didn't get the chance.

However, I had something to look at, even here. There are two bazaars a-week at Kungrad, and then the "bazaar street," a long, narrow, nearly straight passage, roofed in with straw and rushes, was busy enough—sheepskins, fruit, wheaten cakes, robes, earthen vessels, and what not, going on every side. But the town itself is a poor place ; the wall is all broken towards the river, and clean gone on the land side ; and of the one hundred and five shops, I found at least fifteen empty.

About this time reports began to get about of a Russian expedition up the Syr-Daria, and a great beating given to the Kokanese, who held the river in those days. However, Kungrad being out of the caravan track, we didn't hear much till we got back to Khiva ; and even then it was only stray reports from the Kirghiz who came straggling south for the winter. But when spring came, and the first caravan arrived from Bokhara, we heard all about it.

"The Oorooss have taken Ak-Metchet," said the

head merchant, whom my master had asked to dinner, "and have built a fort there, called Fort Perovski, after the name of their leader. They have planted forts on the lower river, and have taken all the land from the Djani-Daria to the Aral Sea. Yakoub Beg* and his people have attacked the forts, but Allah has suffered the unbelievers to conquer. Who can resist fate? And when the Khan of Kokan sent to our Emir (may he live a hundred and twenty years!) for help, then answered Hazret (his Majesty) and said, 'The Oorooss are not touching me—deal with them yourselves!'"

"The wrath of Allah is upon us," said my master. "Even now are the waters of the Oxus flowing westward into their old channel; and thou knowest the prophecy: 'When the Oxus shall come to Kounya-Urgendj, then shall Khiva fall before the Russians!'"

(I learned afterwards that this prophecy is a regular bugbear to the Khivans. When the Oxus altered its channel before Perovski's expedition in '39, they were frightened out of their wits; and they say (I don't know if it's true) that the same thing happened just before we took Khiva the other day.)

Here my master sent me to fetch something; but in

* The present Sultan of Kashgar, at that time an officer in the Kokanese army.

going off, I caught one sentence—"and that they mean to demand the release of your Russian prisoners."

Didn't my heart leap? but I was crowing before sunrise, as the saying is. My master was not one to be done out of anything which he had once paid good money for. When he heard the news, he sat down and thought; and when a Khivan thinks, there's sure to be some mischief coming. The end of it was, that, a few days later, my master sent for me, and announced that he had sold me to the Bokhariote merchant, who would take me back to Bokhara with his caravan, which started in three days' time.

Thus it was that I changed masters for the third time within a twelvemonth; but what the consequences of this last change were to be, neither I nor any man living could have guessed.

CHAPTER V.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

IT was a fine morning in the early summer when our caravan left Khiva ; and this time I started in much better spirits. To begin with, I was on my feet, and able to shift for myself, instead of being crippled and helpless ; and it's wonderful what a difference *that* makes to a man. Then, again, although it was going farther from home, it was still going to a place less shut in by deserts, and trading with all parts of Asia ; so that my chance of escape was actually bettered, especially now that our people were spreading along the Syr-Daria, and dipping down from Siberia into the borders of Kokan. Above all, it was a *change* ; and as I'd heard that there was always a war of some kind going on in Bokhara, I thought that even such poor little half-baked fights as one gets among Asiatics would be better than nothing.

We left Khiva by the Urgendj gate, and marched eastward to Khanki, which is about forty-five versts off (thirty miles). Here it is that the Bokhara caravans cross the Oxus ; and here it was that Kaufmann and

the Tashkent column crossed it this summer, when the Khivans' time came. All the way there, it was just like going through a garden ; for here the fruit is ripe in the beginning of June, and the whole country was one great burst-out of apricots and grapes, and plums, and what not.

We halted at Khanki, a queer little place hidden away among trees, with a little stream winding in and out of it, on the bank of which we camped. The people brought us bread and *koomiss*, or fermented mare's milk—very good stuff in its way, I can tell you ; and my new master, the Bokhariote merchant, thought himself very clever for palming off upon one of them an old rusty pistol that wouldn't fire, in exchange for a handsome dagger. He didn't look quite so jolly, though, an hour or two later, when, as he was trying the dagger on a bit of wood, the handle broke short off in his hand, being only stuck on with gum. And so, as our proverb says, the scythe caught on a stone that time.*

The next day we crossed the Oxus, and a tedious job it was ; for, as always happens, a lot of Hadjís (pilgrims) stuck themselves on to us, and we mustered very strong indeed. However we got through it at last, though to see the horses being dragged on board, and

* A Russian proverb, answering to our "diamond cut diamond."

the men, with their robes tucked up, splashing in the shallow river, yelling and shouting like mad, and every now and then one of them slipping and going down on his back in the water, with all the rest laughing at him, was a very comical sight.

At Shourakhan, the first town on the other side (a little dirt-heap which the Khivans call a fortress, because it has a mud wall round it which you might blow down with a ginger-beer cork) we halted again to find out whether the road was clear; for, you see, there are two roads to Bokhara through Shourakhan—this one up to the north here, leaving the river at Toonookloo, striking right across the sands to the Khalata hills, and so coming down upon Bokhara from the north-west; and then this other farther south, keeping close to the Oxus as far as Oostik, and then turning up to Bokhara, through Kara-Koul and the valley of the Zer-Affshan.

The northern route is the shortest, and the safest from the Turkomans, who hardly ever go there; but the sandstorms and the want of water make it rather difficult. The southern one, as you see, gives you plenty of water, and only about a day and a half of desert altogether; but it's one that the Turkomans are much too fond of. However, some fellows who had just come through told us that it was all right, the Turkomans having lately got a great thrashing from the

Emir, and seeming inclined to behave themselves for the present ; so my old merchant, who was our Karavan-Bashi, or leader of the caravan, decided upon sticking to the river.

I needn't bore you by describing the journey, for these desert voyages are all alike. You come to a well and camp there, and water your beasts, and bake some bread, and have a pipe ; and then you get up and go on again, and the camels grunt and groan, and the hot sand and hot sky seem to grow into each other, and the air is heavy with silence, and every foot of the way seems exactly like every other foot, till you seem to be in one of those dreams where you're always going somewhere, and never get there. I'll tell you what these journeys always remind me of—a game I saw some children playing the other day at Moscow,—trying in how many different ways they could write the same word. The only special thing I noticed on the road was the number of ruined fortresses we passed—three at least between Toonookloo (where the Bokharian frontier begins) and Oostik. Very dismal they looked standing there alone, all gapped and chinky like skeletons, with the sand drifting into them, and not a living thing near ; but you soon get used to that in Central Asia.

My new master was very civil, and though he kept

a sharp look-out upon me, didn't put me in chains or anything of that sort ; indeed, he seemed rather inclined to make me comfortable.

"You see," said he to me, frankly enough, "if you were an ordinary slave, I shouldn't care what happened to you ; but since you can do all these things, and are likely to be worth a good deal, I want to bring you in as fresh as possible."

But what really raised me in his eyes, and in those of the whole caravan, was a thing that happened when we were about midway. We fell in with a Turkoman encampment on the river-bank, and expected a fight ; but they were very civil, treated us to mutton-pilaff* and green tea, and seemed very friendly altogether. While we were eating, up came the chief's son, a smart young fellow, with a wild goat which he had shot, and began bragging about it directly.

"You Bokhariotes," said he (in fun, of course, for no Turkoman ever insults a guest), "you Bokhariotes are good at eating game when it's killed, but a man would be hungry enough if he waited till you shot it."

I saw my master's eye twinkle, and guessed what was coming.

"Speak not rashly, O my son !" said he ; "I have

* Rice mixed with chopped mutton.

a slave here who will beat you, were you skilful as our father Timour."

"That shall be seen!" cried the lad, flaring up; "if he wins, I give him this goat, willingly."

The rest gathered round to watch, and we set to. The fellow shot well, to do him justice; but he was flurried at being challenged in this way, and at seeing so many watching for his being beaten. The end of it was, that I beat him hollow; and he handed over the goat with a very chopfallen air. But instead of keeping it, I gave it to our pilgrims, that they might have a good dinner for once; and all the caravan thought this such a civil thing for an unbeliever to do, that all the rest of the way they called me nothing but "the open-handed."

On the fourteenth day from Khiva we got to Oostik, and turned away from the river into the sand. We halted at the village of Tchandeer, and the next day got to Kara-Koul (Black Lake), a pretty little place, set in a regular frame of country-houses and gardens belonging to the nobility. A great part of the town, however, was in ruins; and I was told it had been so ever since Allah-Koul, the old Khan of Khiva, destroyed it in 1256 (1840), when he marched through Bokhara right up to Tchar-Shambeh-Raumetan, which is only twenty-one miles from the capital.

On the eighteenth day we were at Ak-Tash (White Stone), within five miles of Bokhara, the towers of which could be seen glittering above the trees in the distance. Here we halted to let the custom-house officers make a list of our property; and several soldiers, recognising their friends among us, stopped to talk to them. Suddenly a tall, handsome man in uniform (evidently a Persian), came swaggering past, and was looking contemptuously at us, when one of the soldiers called out to him :

“Ha! Muzaffar Beg, hear you this? There is an Oorooss in this caravan who shoots better than any Turkoman! Look to it, my friend! we are shamed for ever, if the best shot in our Emir’s Guard should be beaten by an unbeliever!”

“No Russian dog shall ever beat me!” said Muzaffar, twisting his moustache disdainfully. “Where is this Rustam (Hercules), who can do such deeds!”

“Here!” answered I, stepping out, and looking full at him.

“They have taken you too soon from your mother, my child! Dare *you* contend with men?”

“Men fight with weapons, women and Persians with their *tongues*. Try me.”

The fellow’s face turned almost black, and like lightning he drew a pistol and let slap at me. I

sprang aside and escaped; but he was just drawing another, when my master, horrified at the idea of losing his money, interfered.

"Help, in the name of the Emir! This slave is a present for his Majesty—no one must hurt him! Help!"

"What is this?" asked a thin sharp voice, just like a hiss; and through the crowd broke a lean, dark, snaky man on horseback, *in the uniform of a Russian General*.* There was a whisper in the crowd, "It is the General—it is Shahrookh Khan!"†

My master told his story. The other heard him in silence, looking cunningly out of his small, narrow eye. Then he turned upon Muzaffar with the wickedest look I ever saw.

"Do you not reverence the King, then, that you offer to kill his slave? This matter must be settled elsewhere."

He whispered two of his soldiers, who instantly blindfolded me and marched me off. After a long tramp we stopped suddenly; I felt myself pushed through a doorway, led over grass, and then thrust violently forward. I snatched off the bandage, and found myself in a small, bare room, and heard the door barred behind me.

* This uniform was expressly ordered from Russia by Shahrookh Khan, who had a passion for aping the form of civilised warfare.

† A Persian refugee, commanding the Emir's army.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD.

I THINK the hardest work in the world is—to *wait*. In all the battles I've been in, the worst part was the last five minutes before it began; the first shot roused me like a gust of fresh air. And just so it was now. If they had led me out and beheaded me, straight off, I don't think I should have cared a bit; but, shut up in this way all alone, with nothing to do but to think, and not knowing how long it might last—knowing only that *some* time or other, it would be decided whether I was to die or not, and that the chances were against me.—I think that was the bitterest time I ever had. Did you ever see the look in the eyes of a trapped wolf, when he sees the mujik (peasant) marching up to him with his hatchet lifted? I can guess by that how I must have looked *then*.

If I could have slept, it wouldn't have been so bad; but while you're hanging between life and death, you can't sleep if you would. It's when all's settled, and there's nothing left to hope for, that you become quiet again. I've heard a man condemned to be shot, thank

the officer who passed sentence upon him, saying that he had not slept for three nights, and that now he should have a good nap. But as for me, I paced up and down like a wild beast in a cage—determined, since they had left my hands free, to fall upon the first man that came in, and take at least one life to pay for my own. For I had heard that these Bokhariotes are great hands at every kind of torture ; and I thought it better to die like a man, fighting to the last, than be torn bit by bit, as children pull the legs off a beetle.

But after a time my head got steadier, and I began to think it all over more quietly. And then (as always happens when you look a bad matter straight in the face) things didn't seem quite so hopeless after all. It was plain enough that Shahrookh Khan was inclined to be my friend, or at least what is quite as good in Central Asia—my enemy's enemy. Moreover, I knew enough of Asiatic ways by this time to be sure that, when a man had once said publicly that he was bringing a slave as a present for the king, the slave was pretty safe not to come to harm till the king had seen for himself whether he was worth having or not. So I settled in my own mind that I should be taken before the king some time or other, and then, if his majesty should be graciously pleased to order me to be beheaded, I'd show fight, and kill at least one man before I went down ; and having

made up my mind to that, I sat down in a corner as comfortably as I could, and *waited*.

By-and-by (I don't know how long it was, but to *me* it seemed a good while) the door opened slowly, and in glided a tall, gaunt fellow in a long white robe, as silently as a cat. He had a basket on his head, which he set down beside me; and in it I saw a great pile of thin wheaten cakes, with a huge junk of water-melon lying on the top of them. As he turned to go, I spoke to him; but he only put his finger on his lips, as if to show that he must not answer, and then slipped out again as noiselessly as he had slipped in.

All this struck me as a good sign; for when you're just going to kill a man, you don't generally take the trouble to feed him; besides, I was terribly thirsty, and hungry as well. So I finished the melon to the last scraping, and every morsel of the cakes as well; and then I began to feel better, as one always does when one has eaten and drunk. I have had to fight on an empty stomach more than once, but I never did it with such good heart; it always seemed as if I hadn't done something that I ought. And now, the basket being empty, I put my arm under my head and fell fast asleep, thinking that, whatever was coming, I might as well take it easy in the meantime.

I don't know how long I slept; but the first thing

that woke me was a smart tap on the shoulder. I was upon my feet in a moment (you learn to wake up sharp when you may have your throat cut any minute), and saw beside me three men—one in a long robe of embroidered silk, the livery, as I afterwards found out, of the king's *makhrams* or confidential servants—and the other two in the uniform of the Guard, scarlet jacket with brass buttons, leather trousers, yellow girdle, and black sheepskin cap.

“Follow us, Oorooss! (Russian)” said the man in silk. “Hazret (his majesty) has deigned to send us to bring you into the light of his sublime countenance. Come quickly.”

I put my hand to my forehead (as I had seen my master at Khiva do when the Khan sent for him), and answered, “The King’s word is all-powerful. I obey.”

At that they all looked pleased, and nodded to each other, as much as to say, “This fellow knows how to behave himself!” and out we all went together.

There were two soldiers standing at the garden gate, as if on sentry, and as we passed one of them looked at me and drew his hand quickly across his throat, and the other nodded. My guards pretended not to see it, but I must say I felt rather queer for the moment. However, getting through a scrape is like fording a

river—it won't do to look back when you're once in ; so I set my teeth and went on.

Tramp, tramp, away we went—the soldiers one on each side of me, and the makhram leading the way. At first it was all through dismal lanes, narrow and dirty as any in Khiva, shut in by high mud walls on either side. Then, by degrees, we began to get into crowded streets, with long rows of shops along both sides, and knots of big, dark, bearded men, in long robes and white turbans, chattering away like so many old women round a village well. A fine mixture they were—thin men and fat men, tall men and short men ; fierce-looking Afghans, with green scarfs and great black eyes ; skinny Kashgarins, with their narrow foreheads and long, lean, *squeezed*-looking faces, and great bat-like ears sticking up on either side of the little saucer-shaped cap ; fat lumpy Sarts, with great thick lips and bloated cheeks, and little squinting eyes, just like an over-fed pig ; dumpling-faced Tartars, slim, graceful Arabs, and long, high-cheeked, black-moustached Persians.

There was such a rush and roar, such a crowding of carts and horses, and donkeys carrying fruit, and camels laden with great bales, that I wondered how we were ever to get along ; but the soldiers kept yelling out, "Make way for the servants of the King!" and

flourished their swords, and whacked two or three people over the shoulders with them, and made such a to-do, that the crowd parted like water, and we got along easily enough.

Once, a long way off, I saw three or four big, florid, yellow-bearded fellows, who I was sure must be Russians; and the sight of them made my heart leap, even though they could give me no help. The makhram (who, I suspect, must have got orders from the king to draw me out and make me talk) told me that this part of the town was the Merchants' Quarter, and asked how I liked it. But I thought to myself, "Least said, soonest mended," so I just nodded, as much as to say, "Very good," and went on.

At last we came to the foot of a steep hill, and went up it by a zig-zag road, with the dust rising all round us in clouds at every step. And as we mounted, there began to grow out of the hill-top a great white wall, standing out sharp and clear in the hot, cloudless sunshine; and above it rose tall, funnel-shaped towers, and rounded domes, and sloping roofs, all glittering with many-coloured mosaic, till it dazzled my very eyes to look at them.

"That's the king's palace," said the makhram, pointing upward. "What do you think of it?"

"It's very fine," answered I, thinking it wisest to float

with the stream ; " but if I were the King, I would add to it one thing more."

" And what is that ? " asked he, with a look that went through and through me like a knife.

" I would have the heads of all the enemies whom I had slain set in a row above the gateway," said I, lifting up my head as if I quite enjoyed the idea. " Such a mighty warrior as the King Nassir Ullah, who has conquered all the kingdoms of Turan (Central Asia) must have killed many foes ; and when their skulls should hang before his gate, then would all men tremble, and say, " Who is like the great King of Bokhara ? "

The two soldiers looked at each other and laughed, as if this were something more than they had bargained for ; and the makhram nodded his head and looked very much pleased. I guessed at once that he was going to tell the King what I had said, which was just what I intended.

At the top of the hill, just in front of the great gateway of the palace, we came upon a broad open space, something like the Caravanserai Square at Orenburg, only nothing like so big ; and there I saw rather a curious sight—some forty or fifty cannon ranged in a square, of all sizes, from one to eighteen pounders—just the same kind of show, in fact, as Napoleon's guns in

the Kremlin at Moscow, which I saw when I was up there for the Exhibition of 1872. Most of them were of brass, and covered all over with carvings of lions, and dragons, and serpents, and all manner of such-like scarecrows; but there were a few plain cast-iron ones among them, which (as I thought at the time) had been bought from our people. I noticed one, a light three-pounder, that was all striped black and white like the door-posts of our post-houses in Russia; and when I came close to it I saw that it was made of bands of silver and iron, turn about.* There was an inscription on its carriage, which the makhram read to me—for although I could speak their tongue I couldn't read it yet—saying that this gun had been taken at the capture of Kokan in the year of the Hegira 1258, which by our reckoning would be 1842.

When we came up to the gateway, the great heavy door, barred and banded with iron, was standing open, and beside it stood two more Sarbazi (soldiers), leaning upon their heavy muskets. Just at the entrance I turned my head to take a last look at the city below, and a brave sight it was. Far and wide in the background the great plain outspread itself on every side, huge and grey, with the blue shadows of the distant

* About a year after the time of which Capt. Kostarenko is speaking, this gun was melted down and coined into money, by order of the Emir.
—D. K.

mountains looming above it along the sky ; while nearer on the view were shady gardens, and dark bosquets, and tiny rivers glancing in the sun, and dainty little villages peeping through the clustering leaves ; and the great white city lying in the midst of all, under the glory of the sunset, with all its towers, and streets, and bazaars, and creeping swarms of men. Just for one moment it was all before me—and then the soldiers pushed me through the doorway, and the gate shut behind us with a dull crash, that sounded to me like the death-volley fired over a grave.

Inside all was deadly still. Not a sound of life—not a living soul but ourselves. And it was a silence that had nothing good in it ; not the stillness of peace and repose, but like the hush before a thunderstorm. I've been through many a battle and many a massacre. I've seen a man eaten alive by vultures, and served three days in a plague hospital ; but I've never seen anything that struck so cold upon me as that great, wide, desolate court, with its dead, cruel silence, that made me feel as if I had gone down alive into the grave. The very soldiers seemed to feel it, and changed all at once from the swagger with which they had marched through the town, to a cautious, tiptoe manner, like hunters approaching the lair of a wild beast.

So we went silently on, like a train of shadows, over

the hot, white pavement, and through another gateway on the opposite side, leading into a smaller court. Round three sides of it ran a kind of cloister (such as I afterwards saw in the palace at Samarcand), and between the pillars of it were huge screens of felt or canvas,—I couldn't quite make out which,—so that no one could see what was inside ; but by a rustling and clanking which I heard from behind them every now and then, I judged that there must be armed men there, and plenty of them, too.

On the fourth side, right opposite the gateway, was a stone balcony, about a *sajen* (seven feet) from the ground, with a curtain of yellow silk drawn across the front of it. Just as we entered, the hangings of the balcony stirred ; whereupon the makhram and my two guards knelt down and touched the ground with their foreheads. Then the curtain was drawn aside altogether, and this is what I saw.

In the front of the balcony, seated on a great pile of cushions, was a short, stout, round-faced old man, with thick lips, wide nostrils, flabby chin, and small, restless black eyes, looking wickedly out from under shaggy grey eyebrows. He was dressed in a plain green turban and coarse dark frock, and had not, so far as I could see, a single ornament about him ; but the moment I looked at him, I guessed at once with whom I had to

do. This dumpy little fellow, who looked like a Sart camel-driver, was the King of Bokhara himself, and he was just going to make up his mind whether I should live or die.

At a sign from the king the makhram came forward, and spoke to him in a low voice. I couldn't catch what they said, but I guessed by their looks that they were speaking of me, and that the makhram was telling him what I had said on the way up. The king's voice sounded not unpleasant, though rather weak and broken; but I noticed that every time he spoke there was a twitching all up one side of his face, as if some one had jerked it with a string.

Suddenly the king leaned forward, and clapped his hands. Instantly one of the cloister screens was let fall, and out filed, two and two, the Sarbazi of the guard, in full uniform, and with muskets on their shoulders,—two hundred at least, as I counted them. Half of them filed off to one side of the court, and half to the other, forming, as they went, in two long lines, from the king's balcony right down to the gateway. Last of all stepped out Shahrookh Khan (still with the general's uniform in which I had seen him at Ak-Tash), and bowed himself before the king, and beside him was Muzaffar Beg. The king looked hard at them both for a minute,

and then at me ; and then he clapped his hands again—this time twice over.

This must have been a signal ; for in a moment a little door in the far corner of the court, on the king's right hand, flew open, and out came a tall, gaunt, hideous black man, with an enormous flat head, and no nose. He was naked to the waist, except a blood-coloured scarf across his chest ; and through his black greasy skin the great bones seemed actually starting, like a skeleton wrapped in black cloth. His white drawers were all covered with splashes of blood, some of which looked quite fresh ; and he carried in his hand a great, heavy, broad-bladed knife, almost like a butcher's chopper.

Coming up to the balcony, he prostrated himself before it, showing his great white fangs in an ugly grin ; and then he rose up again, and stood *waiting*.

Then I thought it was all over with me ; and for a moment my heart was very heavy, for it seemed hard to die before I had done any service to Father Nikolai Pavlovitch (because the explanation has been given before) and Holy Russia, and before I had had a chance of showing that I was of the old Cossack breed. But suddenly I caught Muzaffar Beg's eye fixed sideways upon me, watching to see how I took it ; and I remembered that the eyes of heathen

dogs were upon me, and that I was a Cossack, and one of the "orthodox" * to boot. Then, under my breath, I prayed to God that He would strengthen my heart, and not put me to shame before the unbelievers ; and after that I felt strong again, and drew myself up and looked round upon them all as if I feared nothing.

The king looked hard at me again, and muttered to his makhram (who told me of it afterwards), " This is a bold fellow—he stands firm even *under the shadow of the sword!*" And then he said aloud, " Make proclamation ! "

The makhram (who seemed to be a man of consequence) stepped out into the centre of the court, midway between the two lines of soldiers, and cried three times, as loud as he could, " Ooshar ! " (attend). Then he halted a moment, and went on : " This is the command of Nassir Ullah Bahadoor, the most mighty and glorious king of Bokhara, in whose shadow is the refuge of all true believers : Muzaffar Beg and the Oorooss shall shoot three times at a mark chosen by the king, and he who is beaten shall be beheaded forthwith, and all his goods forfeited. Peace be to the king ! "

It was now Muzaffar Beg's turn to look foolish ; for this was more than he had bargained for. All that he

* " Pravoslavni "—a name frequently applied by the Russians to themselves.

expected was, that the king would either behead me on the spot, or torture me to death later on ; and when he found that it was a case of my life or his own, he seemed no happier than a wolf in a trap. The king looked at him and enjoyed it (as the old brute enjoyed everything that hurt other people), and gave a thick chuckle, deep down in his throat, as if he relished the joke too much to laugh aloud. As for me, I looked Muzaffar full in the face, and his eyes fell before mine ; and then I knew I had him. For when two men are going to fight, or to try each other's mettle, the stronger heart looks through the weaker, and bears it down ; and in almost every single combat that I have fought, I felt sure of winning, beforehand, from that very thing.

They brought me a long Afghan rifle, like Muzaffar's, and spread a small square carpet in the very corner of the court, telling us to stand on that when we fired, and not move an inch beyond it. Then they gave us cartridges, and in the midst of a dead stillness, with all these hundreds of eyes looking at us in silence, each man loaded his piece. Muzaffar's face was firm enough now that he was fairly brought to bay ; but I heard his ramrod go chink-chink against the barrel as he rammed home ; and by that I knew that his hand was unsteady, and secretly rejoiced.

All this while there was no sign of a target ; but

suddenly two of the soldiers stepped out and posted themselves in the opposite corner to us (the opposite one measured slantwise, I mean) about three feet apart; and the next minute Shahrookh Khan, who had slipped away somewhere, came back with a small shield of hard skin, just big enough to cover a man's breast, and with a polished stone in the centre. He walked up to the two men, passed a light rod through a ring in the edge of the shield, laid one end of the stick upon each of their shoulders, and left the target hanging that way—a target with living supporters!

This was my first taste of the king's quality; but it was a fair sample. To *him* the lives of these two men (one or other of whom was almost certain to be killed) mattered no more than two flies: all that he cared for was the sport. He looked at it all for a minute, with another fat chuckle, and then signed to Muzaffar Beg to step forward.

The Persian stood out upon the carpet, and aimed long and carefully. Every one held their breath. At last came the flash and crack, and with it a dull rap, like some one tapping at a door, while the shield rocked violently on its rod. The ball had gone clean through it, but without touching the centre.

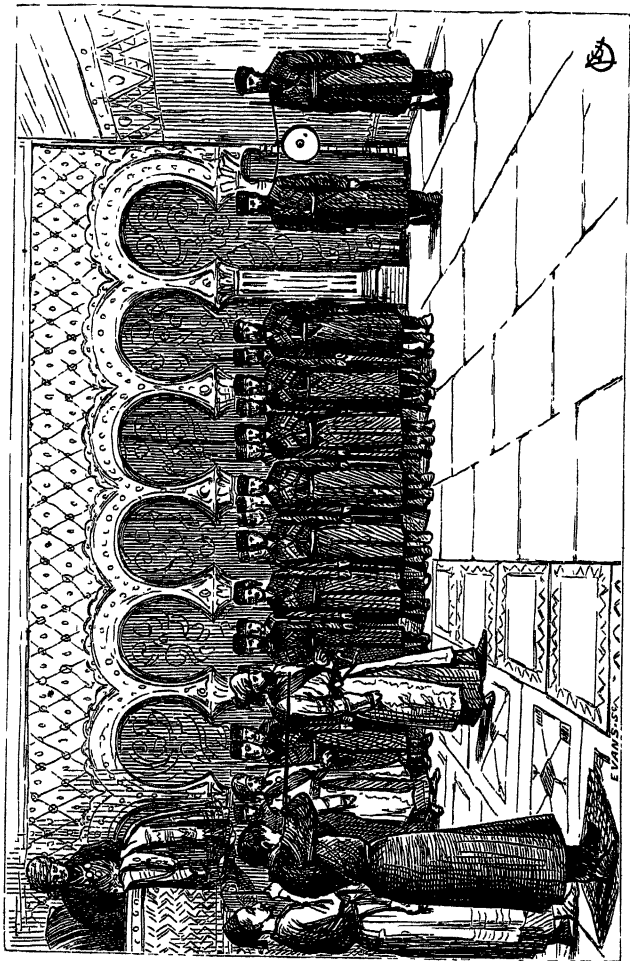
Shahrookh Khan bit his lip, and looked anxiously at me. The king's face was blank as a wall: to look at

him, you'd have thought he had not even seen what was going on. You might have heard a leaf fall as I stepped forward in my turn.

I knew well enough that in shooting for such a stake, the longer I waited the likelier my hand was to tremble; so the moment I got my aim fair upon the bright point in the middle (where the sun caught the polished stone), I let fly. There was a sharp crash, and the bright spot scattered itself like a shower of sparks. I had split the stone!

We reloaded, and fired again. This time the Persian went a little nearer, but still missed the centre. I aimed at a splinter of stone that still remained in the setting, and grazed its edge.

The moment I had fired, I turned round, without knowing why (it was as if something drew me), and looked at the king's face. And an ugly sight it was! The great thick lips were drawn back from the teeth, like a dog just before he flies at your throat. The blood had mounted to his face, flushing it dull purple; and his small, rat-like eyes were fixed hungrily upon Muzaffar's face, as if they *saw* the knife at his throat already. It was the Asiatic's natural love of blood coming to the surface in earnest. I have seen it many a time since then; but, see it as often as you will, it's a very ugly sight.



"I know well enough that in shortness for such a matter the law must be . . .

EVANS, SEN

And it was frightful to see how, just in proportion as the king's visage lighted up with devilish joy, Muzaffar's handsome, scornful face grew cold, and grey, and pinched, as if Death were clutching it with his unseen fingers. Rascal as he was, I almost pitied him; for being killed at one blow is nothing to sliding down inch by inch into the grave, knowing all the time that, do what you will, you cannot save yourself.

When we came up for the last time, the Persian's face was rigid as a corpse, and his hand trembled like a man in a fever. It was pitiful to see him trying to take steady aim, knowing that his last chance of life depended on it; but at last his gun went off almost at random, and the ball, instead of hitting the target, struck full upon the breast of one of the men holding it, who dropped dead without a cry.

The king raised his hand, and another soldier stepped out of the ranks, pushed the dead man aside with his foot, and, picking up the fallen target, put the other end of the rod upon his own shoulder. The moment the target was steady again, I fired, and went right into the centre.

The echo of my shot was still ringing, when the king gave a nod; the black headsman's knife flashed and fell, and Muzaffar's head rolled along the pavement, blotting the white stones with crimson.

“Een kari Padishah hast!” (it is the king’s doing), cried the executioner, holding up the head by its long black beard.

The soldiers, with one voice, repeated, “It is the king’s doing!”

And the king himself held his hand over me, and said, “It is the will of Allah; henceforth thou art my soldier.”

They stripped the dead man of his gay robes, and put them, still wet with his blood, upon *me*; and I was led out of the court, feeling, in spite of my victory and my fine clothes, as uncomfortable as I ever felt in my life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW SOLDIERS.

THUS it was that I became a soldier of the Emir ; and as I shall have to say a good deal about the Bokharian army before my story's done, I had better tell you what it was like at the time I joined it.

Till the reign of this Emir, nobody had ever thought of having a regular army ; when there was a war, they just got together so many thousand armed men from among the people, like what we call in Russia " *Narodnoe Opoltchenié* " (national levy). But Nassir Ullah was a sharp fellow, and saw that if he wanted to conquer Kokan and Shekhri-Sebz (which he did), and to keep the Khan of Khiva from walking in and making a mess whenever he liked (which he did, also, very much indeed), he must have something better to do it with ; so he began to look round for a man to help him.

Now at this time (1831) there came to him a Persian named Abdul Samut,* who had run away from Persia to the English in India, and from them to the

* The murderer of Conolly and Stoddart, and betrayer of Dr Wolff.

Afghans. But when he heard that the Emir of Bokhara was going to raise an army, he thought it would be a good chance for him ; so he came to the Goosh-Beki (Grand Vizier), and offered to teach the soldiers the English discipline. This was just what the Emir wanted ; for he had heard of the deeds of the English in India, and thought that if he could only dress and drill his men like them, he would conquer everybody.

Now, this just shows that the Emir was a fool, and the Grand Vizier another. You can't turn a woman into a man by making her wear trousers ; and you can't turn an Asiatic into a soldier by putting him in uniform. The Emir might have dressed his men like Russians as long as he liked, and he'd never have made 'em fight as *we* fought at Borodino. It's the heart, not the uniform, that wins a battle ; and unless he could give his men the strong heart of the English as well as their dress, he had better have left it alone. I met an Englishman once—when I was at Orenburg three years ago—and he knew enough Russian to talk with me ; so I asked him how it was that the English always conquered in battle, and he answered, " It's because we know how to *hold on*." And I thought it was well said.

However, to work they went to establish a standing army ; and for a while Master Abdul Samut had a fine

place of it. The infantry were 2,500 strong, in red jackets and white trousers, with a high Persian cap of black sheepskin ; each man being armed with musket, bayonet, sabre, and brace of pistols. They were all quartered in one particular part of the town, and paid at the rate of three roubles, (nine shillings) a month per man.

The artillery was copied from the English, and Abdul Samut took special charge of *it*, pretending to know a good deal about it. The Emir had about eighty pieces of his own, besides a few which he took from the Kokanese ; and he had about fifty of them ranged for a show round the palace square, as I told you yesterday. The gunners received the same pay as the foot, but wore black jackets instead of red.

As for the cavalry (which really formed the bulk of the army), there were about 13,000 of them quartered in the town of Bokhara itself. In time of peace they got no pay, but just lived in their own houses and went on with their own work, like everybody else. During active service, their pay was two or three *tillahs* (from eight to eleven roubles) a month, and a remount when they lost their horse. Their arms were lance, sabre, and rifle ; and, to do them justice, they were pretty handy with all three.

These cavalry fellows were the most disorderly of the whole lot ; and, in any civilised country, the first step.

towards disciplining the army would have been to hang them all. As it was, by beheading one or two of them every month, and flogging the rest as often as they needed it, one could manage to get on with them pretty comfortably; but it was hard work. I remember once (a few weeks after I joined) seeing one of these fellows getting bastinadoed at the corner of the palace square; and a very comical sight it was. The man was lying on his back in the middle of about a dozen soldiers, with his legs tied to a post, and a big fellow sitting on his chest to keep him all steady and comfortable; while two others were laying on to the soles of his feet, blow and blow about, with all their strength and soul. But the best of the joke was, that the man who was being flogged was as silent as a stone, while the two who were thrashing him howled and screamed like mad—to save him the trouble of doing it himself, I suppose. So he got his five-and-twenty whacks, and was cast loose. The minute the two soldiers had done whacking him, up jumped two more and whacked *them* in their turn—I suppose for not hitting hard enough; and then a fat old officer, who had been looking pleasantly on, waddled up and quietly boxed their ears all round, as if he were giving them his blessing; and then the congregation dispersed.*

* To anticipate any charge of exaggeration, I may as well state that I witnessed this scene myself.—D. K.

Besides these, there was another cavalry corps, armed with great heavy pieces, almost like new-born cannon, called *djezanlis*, which were carried either in carts or on the backs of camels. When they had to be used, the men laid them on the ground, and lay down full length behind them, and then let fly. The old Emir seemed to think a great deal of them; but except to waste powder, and frighten the men who fired them, they never did any good that I could see.

These were all the divisions of the regular army, which mustered, one way and another, nearly twenty thousand men; but in addition, each province was bound to furnish so many men in case of war, on the same terms as the regulars; and a forced requisition was made of working parties for sapping, mining, and throwing up field entrenchments. When the Emir marched down to the Amu-Daria (Oxus) to repel the Khivan invasion of 1841, he had—as I heard afterwards—as many as one hundred thousand men in the field at once; but for all the good they did, he might as well have hung one hundred thousand shirts to dry, each on the end of a stick.

But to return to my own adventures. When I was dismissed by the king after the shooting-match, they threw a shawl over my head, so as to blindfold me,

and then led me along by the hands. As near as I could guess, we went across the outer court, and then through two or three doors, and up several stairs,—till all at once my muffler was pulled off, and I found myself in a small room spread with rich carpets, and with a pile of cushions in one corner, but no furniture of any kind. Around me stood four Sarbazi, and the makhram who had brought me in at first.

“It is the command of Hazret” (his Majesty) said he, much more respectfully than he had spoken before, “that you remain here till he shall be pleased to send for you ; but whatever you may want, these men will bring it you.”

“Well,” thought I, “this looks rather more promising ; let us just try how the system works.” And with that I turned sharp on the soldiers and said, “You have heard the king’s command ; bring me quickly some food, and then give me a pipe, that I may compose myself to sleep.” And I stretched myself upon the cushions, as if the whole place belonged to me.

The soldiers saluted, and went out without a word ; but I heard one of them mutter to another outside the door, “This Oorooss must be a great man ; he speaks like one of the Serkerdehah (nobles) even as one who must be obeyed. Surely the favour of Allah is upon him.”

In a few minutes—during which the makhram stood close to the door, as if he was not quite sure whether I might not take a fancy to jump up and knock his head against the wall—the four men came back with a big dish of pilaff, a tray of tried fruits, a huge bowl of tea, and a long pipe, which coiled half across the room.

“Have you nothing more to ask for?” said the makhram.

“Nothing,” answered I. “Tell the king that his bounty is as dew upon a dry ground, and that whatsoever may be his commands, the hands of his servant shall be strong to obey them.”

The makhram nodded, and went out, the soldiers following ; but directly the door was shut, I heard a bar put across it, and the clank of two musket-butts on the pavement ; from which I judged that the king’s “bounty” did not extend to letting me go where I liked, and that he meant to keep what he had got. However, this did not trouble me much ; for by this time I was so used to all sorts of impossible adventures, that nothing had power to surprise or disturb me ; and besides, I was Cossack enough to care little what happened to me, so long as I could eat and sleep as I liked. We have a saying, which I daresay you’ve heard among our people on the Don : “A Cossack when he’s standing up can do anything ; but once he lies down, he won’t get up

again for a thousand roubles." And that's pretty nearly true, too.

Well, in that room I remained for three days, guarded by the four soldiers, two-and-two about. Whenever I wanted food or anything else, I had only to call out, and they brought it me, just as the makhram had said; but they wouldn't let me stir an inch beyond the door; nor, indeed, did I much care to try. I knew enough of the Asiatics by this time to know that, being always in the habit of taking things easy themselves, they look down upon every man who does not; and I resolved to show them that, when it came to taking it coolly, I was as good as the best of them.

However, I didn't want for company; for regularly every day (and sometimes two or three times over) in popped my friend the makhram with messages from his master. You would hardly have thought that such an old blood-drinker as the king could be as curious and fond of asking questions as a five-year-old child; but he *was*, though. Nothing pleased him so much (except putting people to the torture) as getting hold of a stranger and asking him every question he could think of; and it was just the same with his own people, if he thought any of them knew anything that *he* didn't.

to any one; for I already guessed *what* had brought these other two to harm. There lived at the corner of the bazaar a certain Jew named Abraham Levi, a fat, red-faced, sneaking-looking dog, who was strongly suspected of having betrayed the king's expedition against Kokan in 1260 (1844), and destroyed hundreds of men by his treachery. I had an idea that he had played the same trick upon the king's two scouts; and as I knew that he would betray me or any one else if it could yield him a farthing's profit, I determined to be on the safe side.

That night, just about midnight, I stole out of the town, and took the road to Karshi.* Karshi is the second city in Bokhara, about ninety miles S.E. of the capital; in my time the Emir had a powder-mill there, and a foundry for casting cannon, in the charge of a Sikh called Nassir Khan, who had served with the English army in India. The first part of the way was flat and dusty, with very little grass; but I got over all that piece while it was still night. About twenty-five miles from the city the country began to get broken and hilly, and the sun was getting hot; so, to rest my horse, I halted a few hours beside a big pond near the village of Karaool-Sarai, and took it easy under the trees.

* Formerly called Neksheb. See "Lalla Rookh."

Later on, I started again ; and I never started anywhere in better spirits. The weather was splendid, which always brightens a man up somehow ; and then the thought of being my own master, even for a short time, and of going single-handed upon a job which no one else had been able to do, made me feel as gay as a peasant at Easter.

All the rest of the way to Karshi, the country was level and rather sandy ; but there was no want of water, the caravan track keeping close to a small river, which rises in the Shekhri-Sebzian hills, and flows through Karshi on its way west. I passed through several villages on the road, and demanded provisions once or twice in the king's name, which the people brought me without a word, being evidently quite used to that sort of thing.

When I got to Karshi, I sold my horse, and bought a soiled cap and coarse blue robe, such as the common people wear ; for after this I meant to pass for a pilgrim going to Samarcand. I put them on behind a wall, and threw my others into a hole ; and there I was transformed. I rested in the town that night, and (as I always did) saw as much of it as possible ; but there was really very little to see. It is a big, dusty town, with a mud wall all round it, in very bad repair, and without a single gun upon it ; and the same description

would just fit every Asiatic town I've seen, from Khiva to Kokan.

The next morning I was off before sunrise, so as to get the cool of the morning ; for a foot-march in those parts is no joke. I've heard people say that they never tire of walking on a fine day ; but they'd tire of it fast enough on an Asiatic road all ruts and holes, ankle-deep in dust, with clouds of it flying up in their face at every step, and thousands of flies buzzing all over them, and the sun roasting their very brains out—let alone a stream running across the road every here and there, through which you have to wade up to your knees in mud. And the skin peels off your face, and the sand gets into it, and your eyes smart as if they were peppered, and you feel prickly all over ; and if anybody were to come and cut your throat, you'd hardly take the trouble to stop him.

By the end of the first day I was hot, and footsore, and dirty enough for the holiest pilgrim that ever stepped. I was glad enough to fall in with an Uzbek encampment near Kara-Tepe, at the foot of a huge artificial mound, said, like everything else in these countries, to be the work of Timour, just as we Russians attribute all our old churches to Ivan the Terrible. I told them I was from Khiva, and had been prisoner many years among the Russian unbelievers (which

accounted to them for my bad pronunciation), and that, having escaped, I was now on a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to Samarcand. When they heard that, nothing was good enough for me; and they kept me with them all night, and asked all sorts of questions about the Russians (which, as you may think, I was well able to answer), and when I left them the next morning, they filled my little skin with water, and gave me enough bread and dried fruit to last two days.

In this way I tramped on for three days more, crossing several steep ridges, which almost wore out my sandals; till towards afternoon on the third day, I saw away to the east a great wall of blue mountain standing up against the sky; and by nightfall I was at the foot of it. I camped there for the night, and started up the hills next morning, leaping, scrambling, and crawling on all fours, like a cat upon a roof. Just at the crown of the ridge I came upon a little mud fort commanding the road, from the gateway of which half a dozen wild-looking fellows, armed to the teeth, started out at my approach; but, seeing I was only a pilgrim, they let me pass. About twenty yards farther on, I turned a sharp corner, and there, right under my feet, lay the place for which I was bound.

It was just like a town built in the inside of a tub. On every side the hills rose up like a wall, so close that

in several places they were hardly two miles from the city ramparts. To the north lay the town of Kitab, to the south that of Shaar, with an open space between them, and the same wall round them both ; for these two make up the capital, like the Old and New Town at Tashkent. The place seemed quite as big as Bokhara, and much in the same style—narrow, crooked streets, and one-storeyed hovels of dried mud, with a few stone houses scattered here and there among them, and the wall of the Beg's palace standing up big and solid in the middle. Through the midst of the town ran a small river, which made its way out through the mountains about a mile to my right, by a deep narrow gorge. In the brightness of the sunrise, the whole thing made a very pretty picture—the dark mountains overhanging the little green plateau, and the quaint old city lying in the midst, with the little river dancing and sparkling through it ; while the atmosphere was so clear that it seemed as if I could throw a stone on to the roofs of the nearest houses, though they were at least three miles off.

And so, at last, I had got into Shekhri-Sebz ; but the next thing was, how to get out again.

For the first week, all went well. A pilgrim is always at home in a Mohammedan town ; and the tale

of my sufferings among the Russian unbelievers, as well as my knowledge of the ins and outs of Bokhara, made me a general favourite. I never wanted for either food or lodging ; and indeed, this hospitality was rather embarrassing at times, when I had twenty dinners thrust upon me in succession, to refuse any one of which would have been a flagrant insult. In Central Asia it is a mark of the highest good-breeding to eat as much as would burst an ox ; and once or twice, I really felt as if I should have *cracked* on the spot.

But all this [time I wasn't idle. I managed to get the height and thickness of the walls without being spied out, and to find out pretty nearly how many soldiers they could muster in case of an attack. I made a rough plan of the town when nobody was looking, and of the Beg's (chief's) palace as well, into which I contrived to slip. I found that they had plenty of guns, but that not more than a third of them (say twelve at the most) were fit for use. Lastly, on the eighth day of my visit, I learned from a conversation which I happened to overhear between two of the officers how much ammunition they had in store. Then I thought I had done enough, and began to think of getting away.

But, as ill-luck would have it, the very evening before my departure, I heard that a famous juggler was to exhibit in the bazaar next day ; and, as I had heard so

many wonderful tales about these fellows, I thought I'd just see this one sight more, and *then* go. And that's always the way with men---*one* risk more, and then be prudent; but it's just that "one risk" that makes all the difference.

The next day there was a tremendous crowd to see the juggler, who had established himself in an open space in the middle of the bazaar. He was a fine-looking old fellow, with a long white beard, in a rich Indian dress; and he looked so slim and graceful, and so high-bred, among all these rough, common-looking fellows, that at first I had eyes for nothing else. But just as he was going to begin, I caught sight of something that put him clean of my head. There, not five yards from me, among a knot of men who were standing on the front of a booth, was the fat, cunning, evil face of Abraham Levi, the traitor Jew of Bokhara!

Here was a fix! If I could have slipped quietly away, I'd have lost the juggling with pleasure; but to move *now*, would draw all eyes upon me in a moment; so I turned away my face as much as possible, and kept quiet as a mouse.

Then the juggling began; and very clever it was. I'm quite used to it now; but this was my first sight of it, and I was immensely astonished. First, a little girl came forward, and played on a kind of tambourine,

and danced to the music. Then the juggler suddenly began to scold her, till she seemed to get frightened, and hid herself under a huge basket which he had put beside him—but he instantly drew his sword, and ran it through the basket; there was a loud shriek, and the sword came back all bloody. Then some of the people thought he had really killed her, and ran forward to seize him; but when they lifted the basket there was nothing there; and presently the girl came running out from somewhere or other, perfectly sound. Then there were great cries of “Yakshi, yakshi!” (well done), and when the girl went round with her tambourine, she got as much money as she could hold.

Then another man who was with him spread a tent, and the juggler went in. Presently the tent was drawn away, and there was the old fellow sitting cross-legged in the air, with nothing to support him; and the assistant took a sword and slashed about on all sides of his master, to show that there was nothing there.

Then he took a large egg, and, laying it on a board, struck it with his sabre, without doing it the least harm. Then he told one of the spectators to pick it up; but although the man took it as carefully as he could, it broke all to bits in his fingers. So then there was more applause.

Then he showed us the mango-trick, which, they tell

me, is very common in India too. He planted a mango-pip in the hard clay, making one of the crowd water it himself, to show that there was no trick in *that*, and then put a cloth over it. Presently he took it off, and there was the first shoot just above the earth. The next time he uncovered it, the thing had shot up some height, and had got a blossom on it. The third uncovering showed us the fruit just forming; and at the fourth, it was already ripe, and he gave us bits of it to taste.

All this seemed so wonderful to me, who had never seen anything like it before, that I forgot all about the Jew, and never even thought of looking to see if he had noticed me.

Suddenly the juggler stepped forward, with his arms lifted, and cried aloud, "Whosoever wishes to know the future, let him ask what he will, and he shall see it!"

There was a kind of half-laugh among the foremost spectators, who evidently didn't think much of his power of prophecy; but a tall, handsome man near me, in Afghan dress, cried eagerly, "Show us what shall be the end of the Ingleez-Adam (Englishmen) in India."

The magician smiled, and took another egg from his basket, which he dropped into a small copper pan, and made a fire round it; and then he threw on the fire a

handful of thick, dark-brown powder. Instantly there went up a smoke that darkened the air, and with it a strong, rich, fragrant smell, that made me feel just as if I were drunk. The people all sat quite quiet, wondering what was to come.

Suddenly the egg burst with a loud crack, and at once the whole air turned blood-red, like the glare of a furnace; and in the midst of the glare appeared a large room, filled with women and children running hither and thither, pursued by a crowd of men with black faces, who were hacking and stabbing among them like butchers in the shambles. Behind, I saw corpses, with white, still faces, floating down a dark river; and men in uniform flying through the jungle, with other men firing at them, or chasing them, sword in hand. Suddenly everything became pitch-dark; and when the darkness cleared away, the whole thing was gone.*

This time the people were too much amazed, to applaud, and the magician had to call several times before any one answered. At last somebody said, "Show us how it will be with the Russians in Turkestan!"

The juggler prepared another egg in the same way;

* Similar feats are recorded of the Herat jugglers. The secret of these tricks is one which I have never been able to fathom.

and when it broke, the air was filled with a bright blue light, showing a steep hillside, with a swollen river at its foot, through which struggled a handful of men in Russian uniform, while, from the hill above, great masses of Asiatic soldiery were firing at them with might and main. They gained ground, however, and were just beginning to scale the ridge, when the Asiatic army broke up, and fled in utter rout.

At this there was an angry murmur through the crowd, and some very black looks were cast at the wizard; when an officer in the front rank suddenly called out, "Show us what shall be the end of the King of Bokhara!"

The magician gave a keen, quick glance at him, and put in a third egg. Everything was dark as night for a moment, and then came a pale gleam, like moonlight, showing something like the courtyard of a palace, into which a dark figure was gliding stealthily, followed by two others. The foremost figure turned its head suddenly, and I *saw my own face!*

That was the last drop that made the cup run over. I sprang to my feet with a cry that made the whole place echo.

Instantly everything was in an uproar. "What is it?" "It's the pilgrim!" "What's the matter with him?"

Then, distinct through all the uproar, came the mock-

ing laugh of Abraham Levi: "Pilgrim indeed! ha, ha! He's a Bokharian spy!"

In an instant they were all upon me at once. I thought all was over, and determined to die game. I snatched a sword from a fellow near me, cut down one man, tripped up another, and made a rush for the Jew; but a blow from behind struck me down, and the next moment I was bound hand and foot. But I had settled with the Jew, nevertheless. Seeing me coming, he started back, missed his footing, and came down with his head upon the corner of an iron-clamped chest; and there was an end of *him*.

Meanwhile the crowd pressed round me, and there was a shout of "Kill him!" but the officer interfered.

"If he be a spy, the Beg must hear of it first. Perhaps, if we torture him, we shall get some information. Take him away."

"But where? these dogs can break any prison!"

"Put him down the old well by the city-gate; let him get out of *it* if he can."

Instantly a cloak was tied over my face, and I was dragged off, amid a shower of cuffs and kicks, and marched away I didn't know where; till suddenly they withdrew the muffler, and I found myself at the mouth of a great black pit, down which they lowered me by a rope, and went off.

And now, you might think, I'd give up all hope ; but not a bit. As soon as my eyes got used to the darkness, I began to look about me, and found myself lying on a heap of rubbish which had fallen from above, blocking up the well to a good depth. Then I thought that (unless there was a sentinel at the mouth) I might possibly work my way up the sides, if I could only get rid of my bonds. So I bent to and fro with all my might, four or five times, to loosen them ; and then began trying to wriggle out. Luckily they were only silk scarfs, hastily tied ; so presently I got one arm out, and then undid the rest. Just then I felt something cold and slimy touch my foot. It was a snake, which had come out of the rubbish, and seemed inclined to show fight ; but, finding I didn't touch it, it glided away into a cleft.

Then a thought struck me. Snakes don't go into solid walls ; there must be a hollow here. Now to find out if this were the *outer* side. I looked up and saw the mark of the rope, which I knew was on the inner side. The cleft was in the *other*.

Then I forced my elbow into it, and heaved with a will. A great piece broke away, discovering a gap big enough to stand up in. I stepped in gingerly enough, expecting to tread on a whole brood of snakes, and with the silver clasp of my belt began to pick at the

wall. But it was dreadfully tough work. The clay was hard, and the clasp bent again and again; and my fingers were bruised till the blood dripped from them, and the cramped posture made all my limbs ache, and my mouth and eyes got filled with dust, and every moment I expected to hear the Shekhri-Sebzians above me, come to lead me to the torture. Ugh! it was like a bad dream! but still I toiled on.

At last, when I was fairly exhausted, I felt the wall shake a little. I threw myself against it with all my force, and a great sheet of it fell outwards, carrying me along with it.

When the dust cleared away, I found myself lying in the ditch outside the wall; and overhead the stars were shining in the clear sky, and the night wind came freshly on my hot face. I was saved!

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWO SIEGES.

I WAS so much afraid of being caught again, that although it was now dark night, I would not go back by the road on which the fort stood, but plunged into the gorge of the river, and scrambled blindly along, holding by rocks, and bushes, and anything I could find. In one place the cliffs rose sheer up several hundred feet, for at least two hundred yards on either side ; and here I had fairly to jump into the water and wade, bruising myself and cutting my feet at every step. It seemed as if that gorge would never end, nor the sun ever rise ; but at last, just as the first streak of dawn came into the sky, I saw light at the end of the great black tunnel, and came out on the open plain once more.

But although I had escaped so far, there was a very black outlook before me yet. I was bare-footed and bare-headed, bruised and bleeding from top to toe ; I had tasted no food for sixteen hours, and had not a crumb with me ; I was still within reach of the enemy, and quite unarmed. But I had not come so far to give

in now ; and I vowed in my heart that, while I could stir hand or foot, I'd stick to my work still.

Tired as I was, I wouldn't even rest till I was beyond pursuit, but dragged myself on as best I might, till about mid-day ; and then thirst and hunger, and the stinging of the flies, and the inflaming of my wounds from the sand getting into them, got the better of me, and I crawled into a ditch for shelter from the sun, and slept as if I were never to wake again.

When I awoke, it was already night ; so I got up and went on again. I found water in one or two of the ditches, where there was any jungle to shelter it ; and as for food, a Cossack knows how to do without that. But by sunrise next morning, I felt that I had got more than I could carry ; for the sun had come down upon my head the day before, when it was only covered by a twisted scarf to supply the loss of my cap. At first I felt only a dizziness, and a feeling as if my head were too big for my body ; and then came a numbness along the back of my neck, and a red mist before my eyes, and everything danced round me, and down I tumbled.

When I came to myself again, I found a man pouring water over my head, and another (a tall grey-bearded fellow with rather a pleasant face), looking

turn south across the hills, and in four days I would come to Tash-Kurgan, on the frontier of Cabool, and there I should find either them or their friends; and they gave me their names, which I kept for a long time after.

These same men showed me a queer game, called "Pacha Wuzeree." There are four throws in it.—King, Wuzeer (Vizier), Farmer, and Thief. The players throw turn about till some one gets "King," and some one else "Vizier," and if a second King or Vizier comes up after that, he turns the first one out. When both King and Vizier are chosen, the first who throws "Thief" is collared by the Vizier, who leads him up to the King, saying, "I've caught a thief." The King asks, "What has he done?" and the Vizier answers, "He has pulled the feathers out of a horse," or "He has stolen his sister's trousers," or some such rubbish. Then the King condemns him to pay a forfeit of some kind—to blow out a lamp and light it again, or kneel down and kiss the ground, or get so many whacks with a knotted scarf. The throw of "Farmer" counts for nothing; and if there is no Vizier, but only a King, no Thief can be punished till a Vizier turns up. We used to have great fun at it, and I made some money by betting upon the throws.

When I came before the King on my arrival, and told him what I had seen, he was very much pleased, for he had quite given me over for lost. He sent me a dish of horseflesh from his own table (which is considered a very great honour), and the next day he gave me rooms in the palace, and made me a Khan, as he had promised.

And now came the question of how to attack Shekhri-Sebz. I thought an open assault very hazardous, and advised the King to surprise it; but Shahrookh Khan (who was evidently getting jealous of me) laughed at the idea, and said boastingly that he would take the town himself, if the King would but give him men enough. So the King appointed him Commander-in-Chief, and sent orders to all the provinces to furnish their contingent of soldiers.

And now, for months to come, there was nothing but preparation—making of powder, casting of guns, collecting of horses and camels and transport waggons, and gathering men from all parts. By the spring all was ready, and Shahrookh Khan rode out of the gates of Bokhara with forty thousand men at his back.

And certainly it was a brave sight. The towers of the great city glittering in the sunlight, and the flat roofs crowded, far as eye could reach, with eager faces and many-coloured robes; and the green leaves sway-

ing in the wind, and the long white road stretching out in front, and, streaming along it, the red jackets of the infantry, and the black caps of the gunners, and the embroidered tunics and fluttering pennons of the cavalry, and the brass guns, each with its long team of horses, rolling heavily along.

But just as Shahrookh Khan came up to the gate, a wild-looking fellow, half-naked, and with hair tossing like a mane (evidently a dervish) started up right in his way, and shrieked out, "Go not forth, O leader of men ; for this journey is not for good !"

The native soldiers (naturally a superstitious set) murmured and looked troubled ; but Shahrookh Khan, who hated all dervishes as much as the King his master, drew his sword and rode right at him. And then, all in a moment, the fellow vanished as if the earth had swallowed him, and we never saw him more.

I thought nothing of this myself, for I knew that many of the people were against the war, and set it down as a trick of theirs to try and stop it ; but the way it damped the whole army was a sight to see. They went along with the look of men going to be hanged ; and over their camp-fires at night they told all kinds of dismal stories, ending with a gloomy shake of the head, and a muttered, "Evil is in store for us ; who can avoid his destiny ?" And the general opinion

seemed to be that some great misfortune was at hand not only for the army, but for Shahrookh Khan himself.

However, *he* didn't seem to think so, for a more careless General I never saw. He didn't send out a single reconnoitring party, and went forward just as if he were on a merrymaking instead of a campaign. And this was all the worse, because, from Karshi onward, our route lay between two ranges of hills, running down toward each other, and meeting just behind Shekhri-Sebz; and if the enemy had come down upon our flank while we were hampered with our artillery (for once or twice the sand was so deep that we had to harness 100 men to each gun in addition to the horses), we should have fared badly. However, nothing happened, and one evening we reached the foot of the Shekhri-Sebzian hills, and camped there for the night.

"I don't like this, your honour," said Kornil Suvoroff—who had stuck by me like my shadow through it all—as we sat watching the moon rise over the hill-tops. "These fellows are too quiet by half; they mean mischief!"

"Will they attack us as we pass the hills, then?"

"Either that, or else take us in the rear when we have the town in our front. This General of ours has got curds in his skull instead of brains; but I'm an old Cossack, and always fear a *quiet enemy*."

However, when we crowned the ridge next morning, I was amazed to find the little fort that commanded the pass deserted, and not a soul in sight. Shahrookh Khan laughed boastfully, and even the soldiers began to look big and make mock of the enemy ; but Suvoroff shook his head. ✓

“This is a bad job,” said he, and I quite agreed with him.

Down we went into the valley, in all our power and splendour, glittering and glancing in the sun like the sweep of a waterfall. Under our feet the town lay still as death ; not a sound in the streets, not a living creature on the walls. It had been terribly hard work to drag up the artillery, but getting them down was easy enough, and in a little while we had several pieces planted within easy range of the gate, while our men swarmed like ants over the whole level, ready to rush in as soon as the gate was forced.

Then suddenly, amid that dead silence, came a dull rumbling from under ground, and in an instant the whole plain around us was one sheet of foaming, leaping water, growing deeper every moment. The enemy had opened their secret sluices (a trick they were fond of playing when attacked) and caught us in a regular trap. Up to the sky went a long wild cry of terror and despair, as our men, forgetting everything in their panic, flung

away their arms and tried to fly. But it was too late. The deserted wall suddenly bristled with armed men, broke into fire, and smoke, and volleying musketry, mowing us down like grass as we struggled in the thick slippery mud and swirling water. It was every man for himself now—all crushing and fighting to reach the higher ground, and those who fell being trampled to death before they could rise; while the bullets came pelting into the crush like hailstones, killing wherever they hit. My horse was shot, and I should have been drowned if Suvoroff hadn't dragged me out; and now the rascals sallied out upon us in boats and rafts, and massacred all before them. If a few of us hadn't rallied on the higher ground, and made shift to check them by a skirmishing fire, hardly one man would have escaped; as it was, we lost seven guns and 4000 men, and were so demoralised that the whole army broke up like a mob, and got back to Bokhara the best way they could.*

Shahrookh Khan sneaked home in disgrace, and found himself even worse off than he expected. For during his absence, the King had intercepted a letter of his to

* This Dutch mode of warfare is peculiar to Shekhri-Sebz, and greatly aided by the conformation of the valley.—The sluices are of considerable antiquity.

the Governor of Meshed, in Eastern Persia, boasting of his high favour, and saying he could do what he liked with the King ; which, joined to his defeat, was more than enough to ruin him. At first the King was for killing him, as he had killed Abdul Samut Khan for the very same thing some years before ; but, thinking that he might possibly need him again some day, he finally decided to banish him (together with his own son, the Crown Prince, whom he also suspected) to Karshi, under the charge of my old friend Kassim the Makhram, who bullied them both, as such beasts always bully a man when they see him down. An old half-caste Persian, Muhammed Ali Khan, was made Captain of the Guard in Shahrookh's stead ; and his beautiful house and garden on the outskirts of the town were given to *me*. I chose thirty Russians from among the Life-Guardsmen, and quartered them in my house for a guard ; and I began to live in great style, like a Bokhariote grandee.

But I remembered long after (though at the time I thought little of it), that as I turned back from escorting the prisoners to the city gate, Shahrookh whispered to me, with a look that gave an ugly meaning to his words, "If ever *you* have cause to fear the king, you know where to find a helper !"

You may be sure that the king wasn't going to sit down with such a defeat as that of Shekhri-Sebz ; and about a week after Shahrookh Khan's banishment, I was summoned to a council of war upon the best way of making another attack. Now, this was the very thing I had been turning over in my mind ; so when the others had said their say and gone out, I had my answer all ready.

"May the king's prosperity increase ! Let the king disband his soldiers publicly, that so every caravan which passes may carry the news that there is nothing to fear from Bokhara. Then let the king remain quiet for a time, that his enemies may fear nothing and wax careless ; but *after that*——"

"What then ?" asked the king, who had been listening with all his ears.

Then I told him my plan, and he heard me to the end without a word ; but, as he listened, his eyes glowed like live coals.

"Good," said he at last ; "thou art wiser than us all, Shahrookh Khan is a dog, and the son of a dog ; had I listened to thee rather than to him, all had been well. Go forth, and bid Muhammed Ali disband the soldiers ; I will do as thou hast said."

Before long it began to be noised abroad that the Emir of Bokhara was so disheartened by his defeat, that

he had disbanded his army. So then the Shekhri-Sebzians thought they were safe, and relaxed their vigilance ; and as time went on, and nothing stirred in Bokhara, they became confirmed in their security, and grew more and more careless.

It was just about a year after the last attack on Shekhri-Sebz, that a large caravan came into their town. The men were in Kokanese dresses, and looked as if they had had a hard journey ; but they brought with them a grand assortment of merchandise, and soon got up a brisk trade. Two or three hundred of them went into the town and lodged there ; but the most part just pitched their tents outside the wall, and made a kind of open-air bazaar there. They offered for sale all sorts of fine silks (for which Kokan has always been famous) and tea, and dried fruits, and Russian samovars, and Chinese goods of different kinds ; and in return they seemed anxious to buy horses, saying that their own were knocked up by the journey.

Now, the Shekhri-Sebzians being about the best horsemen in that part of Asia, there were plenty of horses to be had ; and in a few days the Kokanese had bought enough to mount the whole caravan. Red girdles, too, were in great demand ; and, before long, there was hardly a man in the caravan without one. Once or twice, the Shekhri-Sebzians asked if there were

any news from Bokhara ; but the strangers answered that, when they passed through Samarcand, they heard that the Emir was lying sick, and that it was doubted if he would recover ; “ and we hope he won’t,” said they, “ for he is our enemy, and *your* enemy.” So the Shekhri-Sebzians rejoiced over the good news, and thought no more about him.

Still, the town-folk might have thought it odd, if they had noticed it, that some of their new guests should be always hanging about the Beg’s palace or the city wall, seemingly very much interested in the height and strength of the ramparts ; or that others should be fond of examining every cannon they saw, and even passing their fingers over the touch-hole. Then, again, it might have seemed curious that some of the Kokanese should take the trouble to climb the hills almost every day, and look wistfully along the road to the south, as if expecting something to appear on it. But nobody noticed these things ; and very likely they wouldn’t have understood them if they had.

About a week after the arrival of the first caravan, another one came in from the south—bigger in numbers, but with less merchandise, and, in fact, consisting chiefly of pilgrims. Most of them seemed to be Afghans, but there were also a good many Persians, and even a few Indians, judging by their dress. Most of this last lot

settled inside the town, and it took nearly two days to stow them all ; but they were quite peaceable, and made no disturbance. The Shekhri-Sebzians rather made fun of their quietness, and said these were the meekest pilgrims they had ever seen ; but had they overheard the talk that passed that night between two men who were strolling along the foot of the wall in the moonlight, they might have thought otherwise.

“All’s ready, your honour,” said Kornil Suvoroff ; “and I’m right glad of it, for my part. I’m sick of all this masking and dodging, and want to out sword and fall on, like an honest man.”

“Is everything arranged as I ordered ?” asked I.

“Everything, your honour. The cannon are spiked, and the wall of the palace has a bag of powder under it, big enough to knock a six-foot gap in it when it goes off. Three or four of us are going to get up a row in the bazaar to-morrow, and that’s to be the signal for setting fire to the booths, and beginning the attack. All the second lot have got red girdles too, so we shall be able to recognise them.”

“All right.”

About noon the next day there was a great disturbance in the bazaar. An Afghan swore he had been cheated by a Shekhri-Sebzian trader, and went stamp-

ing about, crying for justice. The trader, getting angry in his turn, fiercely denied it, and cried out that the Afghans themselves were all robbers from their birth ; whereupon the other knocked him down. In an instant up went a shout that seemed to fill the whole air, and every lane of the bazaar bristled with swords and rifles, and the fire burst roaring through the reed thatch, and over the whole town at once the massacre began.

It's no use trying to describe the next hour or two. It was like no other fight I ever fought,—not a fair hand-to-hand battle, but murder and raging madness breaking out in the very midst of a merry-making. Taken by surprise as they were, without firearms, and with no one to lead them, the Shekhri-Sebzians stood to it like men, and sold their lives dearly. Fire above, blood below ; hot ashes and blinding smoke all around ; men falling right and left like mown grass ; the whole air filled with shrieks, and howls, and curses, and crashing musketry ; stones, and tiles, and boiling water flung down upon us by the women in the houses, and death and the devil running riot everywhere.

I had nearly cleared my side of the town, and was standing at the door of a small court, wiping the blood from a wound in my face, when I heard a scream for help close by, which sounded like the voice of a child or a woman. I burst into the court, and found a young

girl in the hands of two of our Uzbeks, one of whom clutched her wrist, while the other had just torn off her veil.

Then I forgot everything ; forgot that I was a slave, and that these rascals were my fellow-soldiers ; I remembered only that I was a *man*, and that a woman was crying to me for protection. Down came my sword, and the hand that held her wrist dropped off like a withered leaf, while the fellow doubled himself up on the ground with a howl of pain. I let him lie (knowing that he was too hard hit to get away, and that I could find him when I wanted him) and flew at the other. *He* was a stout fellow, and stood to it well ; but we had hardly changed five strokes when he went down too, with his skull cut open ; and then I went and finished No. 1, who was still lying where I left him. In fact, it was all over so quickly that I had hardly time to enjoy it.

Then I picked up the girl, who had fainted. She was a little butterfly of a thing, though wonderfully beautiful ; not more than thirteen by her looks. It's true that in Central Asia any girl is a woman at thirteen ; but to me, who seemed to have lived five centuries in these last five years, she was a mere baby ; and as I held her in my arms, it just reminded me of how I used to carry about little Lénotchka at Fort Raim.

I replaced her veil carefully, knowing that *that* would re-assure her more than anything, and, bit by bit, she revived. Her first thought was to feel for her veil ; and finding it all right, she bent down and kissed my hand as if thanking me ; and I tried to comfort her, and told her that she was quite safe. However, I was rather puzzled how to get her safely through the hurlyburly outside ; but, just in the nick of time, I heard Suvoroff shouting for me, and in he came with three or four of my men.

“Lads,” said I, “you must stay here and guard this prisoner, while I go and get our men together. Your share of the spoil will be none the less, trust me. If any one offers to touch her, serve him as I served those dogs yonder.”

The next day but one the king came up from Samarcand with the reserve, having made forced marches all the way. We left a strong garrison in the city, and then marched home in triumph, carrying with us the spoil of the place, and the head of the Beg himself. As for his younger brother, *he* had smeared his face with dust, and put on the clothes of a dead Bokhariote, and walked right through us without being caught ! but we didn't know of this till afterwards.

I gave half my share of the plunder to my soldiers, which made me very popular, as you may think. As

for Noorna (for so my new prisoner was called), we painted her face and dressed her in boys' clothes, and brought her home without any one asking a question. When we got to Bokhara, I established her in the innermost room of my house, with a door that fastened inside, so that she might keep to herself as much as she chose; and I bought a Tartar girl to wait upon her, and made her as comfortable as I could,—considering myself bound (now that she had fallen into my hands this way) to take as much care of her as if she were my sister or my daughter.

“Now,” said I to her, when all was ready, “henceforth you are no longer my slave, but my sister; and may God so deal with me as I shall deal with you!”

CHAPTER X.

SELF-SACRIFICED.

AND now, for the next six months, I might almost have been called happy. It is true that the mere thought that there lived upon earth any man who could call himself my master, was enough to poison any enjoyment; but with the memory of a hard fight still fresh in my mind, and the prospect of others to come—with the feeling of having come in single-handed among these savages, and risen above them as the European breed must always rise above the Asiatic—above all, with the thought of having some one to protect and take care of, I was happier than I ever thought I could be as an exile and a slave.

Ah! to see how her face brightened at my coming and how she settled the cushions for me to sit down, and picked me the best from her little tray of dried fruit, and held the bowl of sherbet to my lips while I drank! And she took such pleasure in it all, and it all came so natural to her, as it comes natural to all women to help and comfort some one, while they remain as God made them. It was a new

thing for me, tossed about as I had been among aliens and enemies, expecting harm at the hands of every one I met, to find any living thing that cared whether I was glad or sorry, whether I fared well or ill; and it touched even *me* to see this little tender creature, whose home I had helped to desolate, clinging to me in her helplessness, and sunning herself in my presence.

Sometimes she would sing me little songs that she had learned in her own home—the home which was now blood and ashes—till the tears stood in her eyes; and then, when she saw me watching her, she would dash them away, and beg me not to be angry, for now she had no one to be kind to her but me. Poor child! better had I killed her with my own hand, upon the carcasses of the Uzbek dogs whom I slew to save her.

It was madness even to *think* of keeping her safe in Bokhara, where the King had spies in every house, and, if the fancy took him, would think nothing of carrying her off, and murdering me if I resisted, as he had done already with so many of his greatest nobles and their wives. But where was she to go? Gladly would I have sent her back to Shekhri-Sebz, could she but have been safe there; but that was hopeless, with a Bokharian garrison in every town.

Poor thing! she soon left off speaking of going home; and indeed, what home could it have been for her, with the King's captains lording it there, and turning everything to havoc and ruin? The thought of all this haunted me day and night like an evil spirit; and, try to hide it as I would, *she* soon guessed it.

"Will the King ever take me from you?" she asked one day, with a great terror in her face.

"Let him dare!" said I fiercely, clenching my fist; for the mere thought of the poor child falling into the hands of that old villain made my blood boil. "Between you and him there are thirty Russian men—and they must be killed *first*!"

But she only shivered, and nestled to me as if for protection; and from that day her eyes had always a scared, piteous look, like the eyes of a hunted deer.

Of course her being there could not remain a secret long; but the few people who thought anything about the matter, concluded that I had turned Mussulman, and taken a Mohammedan wife, and that all was just as it should be. And indeed she might have been my wife, had she only been a Christian; but we Russians hold it a sin and shame to mate with the Basurman (heathen); and day and night my old aunt's words kept ringing in my ears, "Never love a heathen woman, and never bow down to a

heathen god." Still, beautiful as Noorna was, and innocent, and with no one to protect her against the King's tyranny if *I* did not, there's no saying how it might have ended ; but it was fated that the question should be settled for me in a way that I little dreamed of.

One morning when Noorna and I were sitting together, the little Tartar slave who waited upon her came and told me that a Makhram from the King wished to see me. I went out into the great room, and found Kassim (the same Makhram who had brought me to the King for the first time) waiting for me. He saluted me, and spoke in a loud, clear voice, every word of which, as I knew well enough, would go straight to poor Noorna's ears in that silent place :—

"Yilderim Khan ! his Majesty has heard of your Shekhri-Sebzian slave, and is graciously pleased to honour you by taking her to himself. He has sent me, the humblest of his slaves, to tell you that this evening, about the time of sunset prayers, we shall come to bring her, with all honour, to the King's palace."

It had come, then, at last ! There are not many moments like that in a man's life—it is Heaven's mercy

that there are not. I tell you, Englishman, you do well to bless God that you are free ; for you never taste the full bitterness of slavery, till you feel yourself powerless to protect even what you love best.

For a moment I felt inclined to strike him dead on the spot ; but I controlled myself with a mighty effort, and answered quite quietly :—

“ The King hath spoken, and his word is all-powerful. Do we not all belong to him ? ”

The makhram bowed and retired. I listened till his steps fairly died away, and then called to my thirty Russians :—

“ Are you there, lads ? ”

“ Here we are, your honour.”

“ Shut the gates, and bar them. Ten of you keep the great gate, ten more the western entrance, and the other ten the garden-door ; let no one pass while one of you remains alive. I shall be with you.”

The men saluted, and filed out without a word, like true Russians. They knew that they were to die, but not a man of them asked why or wherefore ; it was enough for them that their Captain was at their head, and had told them what to do. Even in that desperate strait, with no thought but to kill and be_killed, I felt proud of them.

“ We must all die,” said I to myself, “ but for each

life of us there shall be many a house empty in Bokhara to-morrow !”

But just as I was beginning to load my arms, Noorna's Tartar girl came to me and said, “My lord, my mistress would speak with you.”

Back I went in hot haste, and found the poor thing crouched among her cushions like a child that has been punished, looking wistfully towards the door.

“The King has sent to take me from you—is it not so ?” asked she, in a firm voice, though her face was like a corpse.

“It is so,” answered I ; “and now there is nothing left for us but all to die together—but our death shall be a story to tell while Bokhara lasts !”

“Not so,” said she, sadly ; “it is not fit that many men should die for one woman. Make no resistance.”

“What ?” cried I, starting, “do you bid me give you up to that wild beast ?”

“There will be no need,” she answered, with a strange, sad smile, fixing her great dark eyes upon my face.

For a moment I stared at her in bewilderment—and then I started back with a cry that made the room shake.

Her sleeve had fallen back, and there on the round smooth arm lay *three drops of blood*, while beside her was a small gold-hilted knife, no bigger than a lancet.

Such a scratch would not have hurt a child, with the steel alone; but—what *beside* the steel had been there?

In a moment I saw it all. I flung myself on my knees beside her, and put my lips to the wound, hoping that I might even yet suck out the poison, whether it killed me or not.

“Too late!” said she, pushing me gently away. “For *that* poison there is no cure; and the women of our race know how to die when their time comes.” (And, for one moment, her face looked as royal as a queen’s.) “I know that thou and thy people would defend me to the last; but the King’s soldiers are many and strong, and his heart is hard as iron. Why should the lives of many brave men—and *thy* life, which was risked to save mine—be wasted for a poor weak girl like me? It is better for me to die now, as our women *can* die, than live to be the slave of my people’s enemy and thy murderer!”

I sat down beside her, and put my arms about her without a word. She nestled to my side, and looked longingly up in my face.

“I would fain have helped thee,” she went on, “but I can do nothing. Had I been a man, I could have fought by thy side, and shielded thee in battle; but I am a weak woman, and can only die to save thee. Many a time did my mother tell me that it is bitter

to be a woman, but I have never fully known it till now."

I answered not a word—I could not have spoken to save my life—but strained her closer to me, as if with my overflowing life and strength I could revive hers; but all the while I felt her warmth and life dying out under my touch. God in heaven! how helpless I felt then!—I who had boasted of my strength, who had cut down men like thistles, and defied all dangers; and yet I could not even save *her* life from a scratch like this!

"The Angel of Death waits for *me*," said she at last, "but *thou* hast yet many years to live. Thou wilt yet return to thine own people, with power and great honour; and among them" (here her voice failed for a moment) "thou wilt find one who will love thee as I have done, and thou wilt be happy with her. *Then*, when thou are happiest, remember sometimes the little child whom thou didst save, and who died for thee because she could give thee no other help."

I tried to answer her, but something seemed to choke me. I hid my face on her shoulder, as I used to hide it on my mother's long ago, and—well, I may confess it—cried like a child.

It takes much to make a *man* shed tears; but think what it was to me. All my kinsfolk were dead and gone; I was a stranger in a strange land; not a soul

on earth cared whether I lived or died ; and now, the one little gentle creature that loved and trusted me in this accursed den of heathens and traitors, lay dying before my very eyes, and I could not help her.

She was silent again, and we sat there side by side—how long I cannot say, for I took no count of time. Suddenly a tremor ran through her, and she lifted her face, and murmured brokenly, “ Kiss me—once—before I die ! ”

I kissed her, as if my whole life went into it. She seemed to gather strength for a moment, and went on as firmly as before :—

“ Farewell ! I go to my own people. Think of me sometimes when thy heart is sad, that I may comfort thee even though I die. And I will pray Allah that thou mayest yet be turned to the true faith, that so we may be together in the rose-gardens of Paradise, under the sun that never goes down. And if not ”—and her hands pressed mine, while a great light of tenderness lit up her closing eyes—“ if not, I will pray the All-Merciful to let my soul look upon thine, were it but once in a hundred years, across the distance between—that so we may remember each other still ! ”

She pressed my hand once more ; and then her head fell back suddenly—a light flutter, as of a struggling bird, ran through her whole body—and all was done.

When the king's makhrams came in the evening to take Noorna, they found me sitting beside the body, still as a statue. As they entered, I just lifted my head and gave them *one look*—and then sank back again. I can guess what my face must have been like, by their shrinking away so when they saw it; but I heard afterwards (for at the time I was in no state to hear or understand anything) that my servants told them that Noorna had been stung by a serpent, and was dead. So the king concluded that this was done by the jealousy of his other wives, and thought no more about it.

But before midnight I was all myself again, like one waking from a dream; and I called for my henchman,* Kornil Suvoroff. When he came, I was just finishing a letter, which I folded up and handed to him.

“I can trust you, I think, my lad?”

“Your honour knows that.”

“Get out of the city, then, as quietly as you can; but the moment you're outside, ride with all speed to Karshi; seek out Shahrookh Khan, and give him this letter.”

“Aye, aye,† your honour!”

* The Russian word is “*Stremyanni*,” or man of the stirrup—analogueous to Sir Walter Scott's “boy of the belt.”

† This is our best English equivalent for the untranslatable “*slooshaioo*,” by which the Russian expresses obedience. The word implies both “I hear,” and “I obey.”

“If you’re pursued and overtaken, tear the letter in pieces, and then let them kill you!”

“Aye, aye, your honour!”

He touched his cap to me, and was gone. I mounted the flat roof, and saw him glide away like a ghost (for his horse’s hoofs were muffled) in and out of the black shadow cast by the houses in the moonlight, till at last he reached the gate.

As he passed through it, the bright moon suddenly clouded over, and with it went out also the light of Bokhara—for ever.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

IT was perhaps as well, both for the king and for me, that we didn't meet just then. In the very nick of time, there came word that the Turkomans of Merv had crossed the Oxus a little below Tchardjuy, and were laying waste all the country round about. So Muhammed Ali, the Captain of the Guard, sent me after them, with a hundred picked men; and when I found myself in the saddle once more, with armed men at my back, and my face turned towards the enemy, it was like a burst of new life. A man in sore trouble flies to action like a thirsty man to water; and to me, at that moment, the prospect of wounds, and blood, and hunting men down like wolves, was like dew on a dry place. Never tell me that suffering softens a man's heart; just the contrary—it makes him cruel as a tiger. He says to himself, “Why should I spare others, when I have not been spared? let them suffer as well as I!” And when he gets to that pass, beware of him!

It was at a village beyond Kara-Koul that I first got any certain tidings of the Turkomans. The people

seemed terribly frightened, and crowded about me as if I had been their guardian angel; and they brought me two men who had just come in, robbed of everything, and stripped almost naked. They told me that the Turkomans had broken into two bands, one keeping the passage of the Oxus, so as to catch whatever went over, while the other scoured the country to the west of the usual caravan route, the last caravan having made a circuit to avoid them.

Then I saw my way clear. I made them bring me a good number of camels, and loaded them with bales of sand, or gravel, or rags, or anything that would make a good solid bundle. I dressed up most of my men as camel-drivers or pilgrims, leaving only a few to follow on horseback a good way behind the caravan, and then away we went toward the west.

On the morning of the second day I saw two or three horsemen hovering in the distance, and then I knew that our fish were taking the bait. Towards afternoon a great cloud of dust began to roll up towards us, with a sudden glitter from the midst of it every now and then; and as it approached we could see looming through it the heads of horses and the black caps of the Turkomans. Then my men—as I had ordered them—took to their heels or fell flat on the ground; and the robbers, never heeding them,

went straight to the camels. Then, while they were all clustered like bees, pulling the yokes off, tearing down the bales, and ripping them open, my men suddenly faced about and let fly, bang into the middle of them !

Then began a slaughter ! At that close range, and fired into such a crowd, our volley scooped a regular trench in the throng, like boiling water in snow ; and while the rest stood stupefied, hardly knowing what had happened, we gave a shout and fell on with our swords. Then they rallied, and fought as men fight for their lives ; and for two or three minutes I felt almost happy again, with the sabres clinking round my head, and men going down to right and left like ears of corn. But it was too good to last. For now up came our horsemen, and the few Turkomans who were left tried to fly ; but our horses were fresher than theirs, and we rode them down, one by one, like wolves in winter.

One man only we spared, because he offered to lead us to their other encampment. We made him guide us till within sight of it, and then killed him by way of reward. We fell on at midnight, when they were asleep and feared nothing, and by sunrise there was not a man of them left. One fellow plunged into the Oxus, and tried to swim across, but when he was about half-way, the moon came out and fell on the water just where he was. I hit him fair between the shoulders,

and just saw his white teeth glitter for a moment in the moonlight as he lurched backward into the water, and went floating, face uppermost, down the stream.

Then I gathered the heads of the slain, and built them into a pyramid, and put over them this inscription,—“These were Turkomans, who offended Yilderim Khan.” And then we turned homeward, for there was nothing left to do.

Out of my hundred men only sixty-three were left, for the Turkomans know how to fight, and the sun had struck down almost as many as they did. But even in the heat of it all I had sense enough left to spare my Russians, and get as many of the Sarts and Uzbeks killed off as possible. I never once forgot what was *to come*, and knew that, for *it* to succeed, the fewer of the King's men in the guard, and the more of mine, the better.

When we halted at Kara-Koul on our way back, the people were full of rejoicing over what we had done, and made as much of me as if I had been the Prophet himself. But I cared little for all their shoutings and blessings; for I got a piece of news here which put everything else out of my head—that the Emir, who had gone to Samarcand to get up another expedition against Kokan, had fallen ill, and was coming home again, leaving the army behind.

It was all I could do to keep my face steady when I first heard the news, for this was a chance such as I had never hoped for. The King coming home, and all the army out of the way—and the Guard in my hands! *Then*, for the first time, I felt that I had him.

After that, every hour seemed as long as five till I was back in Bokhara again. When we got in, my men were reeling in their saddles; but I never thought of the fatigue—I looked straight through all that to what was *beyond*. I arrived just two days before the King; but two days make a deal of difference *sometimes*.

At the door of my own house I was met by a servant. "My lord, there is come to you a trader from Karshi, who begged leave to pitch his tent in your courtyard, saying that he had brought certain precious stuffs for you, of which he feared to be robbed."

I passed my hand quickly over my eyes, that the fellow might not see how they flashed, and bade him bring the trader to me. Presently there entered a big, heavy-looking old man, with a long grey beard, and huge white turban pulled down on his forehead, followed by a slim, good-looking lad carrying a bundle of silks. I didn't need to look at them to know who they were. The old man (though he was disguised so that his own father wouldn't have known him) was Shahrookh Khan,

and his young apprentice was the King's son himself—the Crown Prince of Bokhara.

I gave them pipes and coffee, and we had our talk. I needn't repeat it, for when men are upon a business, one whisper of which would cost them their lives, they don't waste many words. In half-an-hour all was settled. Shahrookh and the Prince slipped away to their tent in the court-yard, and I went forth to my work.

The first thing to be done was to spread a report that the King's illness was serious; and, without committing myself, I managed to get it all over the town in a trice. Next I sent a large present of opium to Muhammed Ali, the Captain of the Guard—a lazy, do-nothing old rogue, who left all the work to me, and who, once he got his pipe filled with opium, wasn't likely to trouble any one for four or five days to come. Then, little by little, I withdrew the guards from the palace, and replaced them by my own men, under pretence of giving every one his regular turn of duty; and, by the time the King arrived, all was ready.

Two days later, he sent for me. He was looking very pale and languid, but I saw at once that he might recover, *if* nothing prevented. But when I told him of the slaughter of the Turkomans, it was gruesome to see how his dim old eye glared, and the blood mounted to his

wan flabby face. And when one of my soldiers poured out before him the right ears of the slain, which we had cut off as a trophy, he felt them lovingly with his large fat hands, and gave a grin that showed all his fangs from ear to ear.

Just at that moment, in came a courier with a letter.

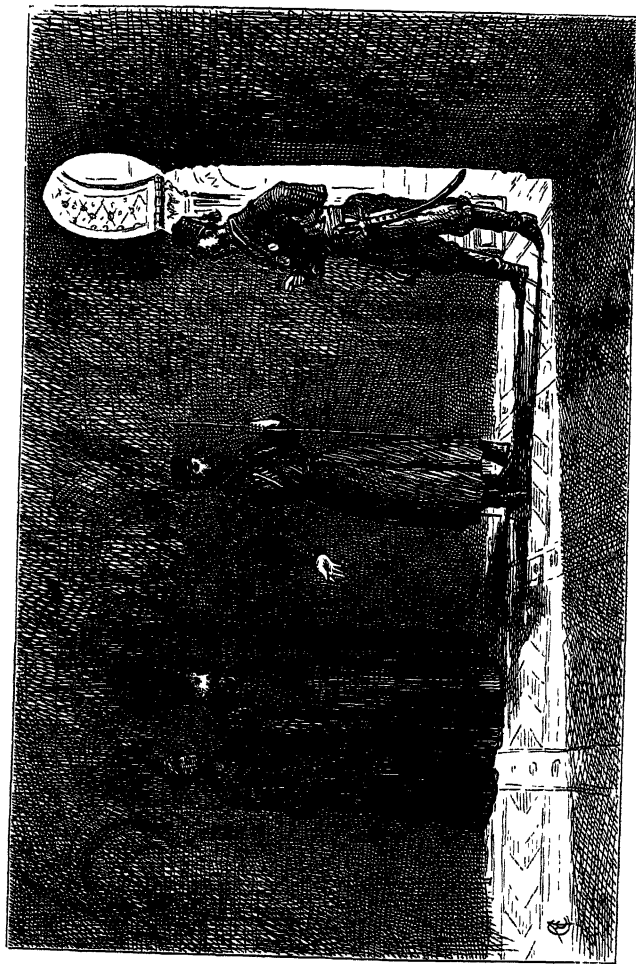
The Emir opened it—gave a sort of gasping growl, like a choked tiger—and, raising himself on the couch, with one slash of his sabre, almost cut the man's head off. The fellow rolled at my feet, his head hanging lopsided ; while the king roared out "Guards !"

I thought it was my turn now, and felt for my pistols ; but the king gave some orders that I could not hear, and the guards returned presently with my old friend the black headsman, and a lady, trembling sorely, and *unveiled*—whom I knew by her dress to be the king's chief wife, the sister of the Beg of Shekhri-Sebz. She was wonderfully beautiful, but with the same frightened look in her eyes which every one had who lived within reach of this old bloodhound.

"See you this," yelled the king, pointing to the letter ; "your brother, the dog of Shekhri-Sebz, has rebelled again. Within a month shall the dogs gnaw his bones upon the ashes of his city ; but first"—

He gave a nod, and her head fell at his feet.

For a moment I was just on the point of springing at



“ ‘Captain,’ said he, ‘these two men have given the password, and begged us to bring them to you.’ ”—Page 163

him, but any rashness *now* would have spoiled all. I bit my lips till they bled, and looked from the pale, beautiful face on the floor, with its long silky hair 'all dabbled with blood, to his great, purple, savage visage, with a thought in my mind that would have rather startled him if he had known it.

Then he waved his hand in sign of dismissal, and I went out.

Night came on, black and dreary, as if it knew what was to come. I had remained in the palace, under pretence of going my rounds, and seeing that the guards were at their posts. Just about midnight, I was standing at the gate of the inner court, when a soldier came up to me.

"Captain," said he, "these two men have given the password, and begged us to bring them to you."

I looked and saw behind him two shadows which seemed to grow out of the darkness; for they were swathed from head to foot in long black robes (fit colour for the work they came to do) and could hardly be seen. The soldier left them with me, and went off.

"Is all ready?" asked a sharp whisper, which I knew for the hiss of Shahrookh Khan.

"All is ready," answered I; "I will see that the ante-room is clear, and you can do the rest."

"Do you not help us then?"

"No!" said I savagely—for there are things that a man *can't* do, and this was one of them. "Anything that can fight I'll kill, but not a sick old man. Do it yourself—it's fit for you!"

Without a word he turned and followed me. The other glided after like a ghost; but a stray gleam of light fell on him, and I saw the pale stern face of the Prince—the son going to the death of the father.

We dragged ourselves up by the balcony, and slipped into the antechamber, where one of the King's servants always slept. Unluckily the fellow was half awake, and started up at our approach; but before he could utter a sound my hand was on his mouth, and my dagger up to the hilt in his throat; and as I dragged the body away into a corner, Shahrookh Khan and the Prince glided like shadows into the King's chamber.

Then came a dead silence—a silence that seemed to prick me all over like a pin; but at last, after a time that I thought would never end, Shahrookh appeared at the door with a lamp.

"*It is done!*" said he, in a hoarse whisper. "Go forth, and be ready at sunrise to proclaim the new Emir, Muzaffar-ed-Deen!"

As he said, so it was done; and to those who saw it next day, the body told no tales. They had swathed

a wet cloth round his face as he slept, and stifled him without any mark of violence.

So died the great Emir, the conqueror of Shekhri-Sebz and Kokan, the most famous tyrant of the East. He lived like a tiger, and he died like a dog.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO WAS HE?

THE murder of the Emir was not Shahrookh Khan's only feat that night; for he was too thorough a Persian not to take care of himself as well as of his master. The next morning Muhammed Ali, who had been made Captain of the Guard instead of him, was found dead in his bed; and Master Shahrookh stepped into his shoes at once. The physicians gave out that he had died of apoplexy; but I heard afterwards that one of the women-slaves from Kokan, whom the king had taken from Shahrookh to give to him, had made his coffee that evening, and that he had complained of its having a curious taste.

It was a good proof how thoroughly hated Nassir Ullah had been, that the proclamation of the new Emir passed off without any fighting worth speaking of; for, as a rule, the folk in Central Asia get up a battle over the accession of a new king as naturally as we do an illumination. But this time everybody was so sick of the old brute's tyranny, that they just let things take their course. A few of the soldiers, to

whom he had given good pay and plunder, seemed inclined to make themselves disagreeable; but they were quietly beheaded and thrown down a well, so that everything went off comfortably.

As for Kassim the Makhram, who had come to take Noorna away, I hunted high and low for him, that I might show him how a Cossack *remembers*. But the beast escaped us after all; for when he heard what was done (which he did before any one else), he knew what chance of mercy he had from me and Shahrookh Khan; so he gathered his wives about him, and bade them bring him food, and spices, and all manner of dainties, and feasted with them all for the last time; and then he went into a warm bath, and bled himself to death.

As to the arrangements of the Government, they were soon made. Shahrookh Khan became Goosh-Beki, or Prime Minister; I was made Captain of the Guard; two or three of the banished ministers were recalled to make up the list; the late ministry were quietly put to death; and everything was got to rights in less time than it takes to clean a house up.

The new head of the artillery department was a certain Arslan Beg, who had come with the prince from Karshi. When he came to pay his respects to me the morning after the installation of ministers, I thought I knew his face; and as he approached, I was

sure of it. And who should this be but Nikolai Arsheennoff, the Russian sailor who had defended me when I was mobbed at Khiva.*

I looked at him very solemnly for a moment, and then burst into a laugh, and called out in Russian, "Nikolai Ivanovitch! have you made it up with your captain yet?"

You should have seen how he jumped! just as if he had touched a hot samovar.

"What! are you the little fellow whom I saved at Khiva? You must have gone uphill at a good rate since we met last!"

"Pretty well; but it seems to me that *you've* got your spoon in the dish too. There's some difference between a pair of canvass trousers and the uniform of an artillery commandant."

"Yes; it's a fine country for a man to get on. When there's a war, you rob the enemy; and when there's peace, you rob the Government."

I put a rich robe over his shoulders, as the fashion of the Asiatics is when they do honour to a guest, and let him go; but it struck me at the time that many a greater man than ^{he} had got on in *that* way before now.

* This man afterwards deserted to the Khan of Kokan. His ultimate fate is unknown.

It was just about this time that I lost my best ally, Kornil Suvoroff. While I was away in the east, getting up the second expedition against Shekhri-Sebz, Col. Ignatieff* had come as ambassador from Russia to Bokhara, demanding the release of all Russian prisoners, and the abolition of the double duty levied upon Russian caravans; for, you see, Russia having got the Crimean war off her hands two years before, had time to think of Central Asia again, and thought of it a good deal. However, the Emir had shilly-shallied with him, and got rid of him at last without settling anything; but the new Emir, being on the brink of another war with Kokan, wanted to keep Russia quiet and therefore proclaimed, the moment he came into power, that all the Russians in his dominions were free to go home as soon as they liked.

This *was* a temptation to me, I must confess. At the thought of hearing the old language again, and seeing the faces of Christian folk, and the crosses and churches of the true faith, after all these weary years among lying heathens, I hardly felt the ground under my feet. But it could not be. I wished to come back to my own people, not as a runaway slave, but as one who had done something to serve them, and had not lived altogether in vain. I knew that, by staying here a

* Now General Ignatieff, Russian ambassador at Constantinople.

few years longer, I could strike a blow at Bokhara which could never be healed ; and I was not going to leave my work half done. Moreover, it was not enough for me to have destroyed the king ; my vengeance was not complete till Bokhara itself, with all its power and glory, should go down into a bottomless gulf. I determined to remain.

But when I told this to Kornil Suvoroff (who was half mad with delight at the thought of getting home), his joyous face grew blank as a wall, and he looked wistfully at me, as a dog looks at the master who is angry with him.

"Never mind me, my lad," said I, guessing what he was thinking of ; "I can take care of myself. What's the use of my going home, when there's no one there to welcome me ? But *you* have got friends watching for you, and you must think of *them*."

"That's just it, your honour. If it were only myself, I'd stand by you, God knows, till one grave covered us both ; but there are some far away in the north who pray daily to God that they may see my face once more before they die. You *know* I wouldn't leave you, if it weren't for that !"

I held out my hand to him, and he seized it in both his, and grasped it hard. That was all we said.

But before the prisoners left, I got together six of

them (Suvoroff being one) who were sharper than the rest, and had seen more; and from their dictation I wrote a full report of the strength and organization of the Bokhariote army, the native fortresses and garrisons, the different routes, with particulars of forage, water, &c.; in short, everything that would be of use to the Russian generals when they came to invade it.* When I had done, I made Suvoroff stitch it up in the breast of his shirt, and bade him give it to the first Russian officer he met, to forward to the Governor-General. And then I made a list of the names of all the six. Here they are—

“Ivan Martchenkoff, of the 3d Siberian Cossacks, aged 45.

“Kornil Suvoroff, of the same regiment, aged 45.

“Ivan Nenilin, of the 4th Siberian Cossacks, aged 60.

“Vasili Pshenitchnikoff, Perm peasant, aged 63.

“Pavel Yarkoff, Orenburg peasant, aged 36.

“Theodore Feodotoff, Polish exile, of the 6th Orenburg battalion of the line, aged 50.”

Then I bade them good-bye, and away they went.

And now came the last war with Kokan—another of the means by which these brainless Easterns did our work for us. It was just this constant fighting between

* A copy of this report is in my possession.—D. K.

Khiva, Bokhara, Kokan, and Shekhri-Sebz which wore out all four so thoroughly, that when *we* came upon them at last, they fell into our hands like a ripe berry. And just so it was with this war. Two men laid claim to the crown of Kokan; and (like all folks who go to law) they called in a third, who swallowed them both.

To do the young Emir justice, *he* was prompt enough. The moment he got word of the split in Kokan, he sent forward Shahrookh Khan and Muhammed Hassan Beg (who had been put over the artillery after Arsheenoff's desertion) with 30 guns and 40,000 men, while he himself followed with as many more, including a strong band of Teke-Turkomans from the southern desert, for, as our proverb says, "Even a crab counts when fish are scarce."

I was with the first army, and very glad of the chance; for since my spying expedition to Shekhri-Sebz, this was my first time on perfectly new ground. We marched first from Bokhara to Samarcand (one hundred and fifty miles east) over a pretty level country, very deep and sandy for the most part, but with villages and small towns at every turn. We passed two fortresses, Kerminch and Kette-Kurgan*—both just like all the rest, with huge tumble-down mud walls, and not a single gun. At Kerminch I told the

* Now the frontier fortress of the Russian territory.

commandant, in joke, to give orders to the garrison not to talk too loud, for fear of loosening the wall; and the fellow actually went and did it!

Along the whole way I noticed square milestones, attributed to Timour, and looking pretty firm to be five hundred years old. You see them on a good many of the Bokharian roads, and thence comes the native measurement of so many "Tash," or stones—the "Tash" being eight Russian versts (a little over five miles). When we got to the foot of the Tchepan-Ata hills, behind which lies Samarcand, we camped there on the bank of the Zer-Affshan, waiting for fresh stores from the town; and, having got them, we turned northward through the rice-fields to Djizak. Here we had several days of heavy rain, and our march was uncomfortable enough; but just as we were leaving Djizak, and getting fairly out on the Steppes, the rain went off, and the heat came on.

If you look at the map, you'll see that, marching east from Djizak across the Steppes, you come first to Oura-Toubeh, and then, on the bend of the Syr-Daria itself, to Khodjent. Beyond this, again, lies Kokan; and, to get at it, you must take the other two first. Our march over the Steppe was dreary work—always the same bare, hot, desolate plain, covered with thin, stubbly grass, and with the ridge of the Sanzar-Tau always on

our right hand, like a wall. I saw snow on one or two of the peaks; but whether they were part of the Sanzar hills, or of some more distant range, I couldn't quite make out. The heat was tremendous all the way, and there was little water in the wells, so that we suffered a good deal; and I remember how it touched me one day when one of my Russians (for several had remained with me, not daring to go home because they were deserters) brought me the last drop of water in his flask, saying, "Drink, Ostap Danilevitch! you've shared with us, and we'll share with you!"

At last we came in sight of Oura-Toubeh, a great steep rock, with a little mud fort perched on it, and a straggling mud village at its foot—looking, as I thought at the time, just like a big tea-urn with a lot of cups and saucers round it. I could make out guns here and there along the wall, and began to hope for some fighting; but the cowards (plague take 'em!) no sooner heard our cannon open upon 'em—though not a shot went *near* the wall—than they came out and surrendered—surrendered a place which, if they had had food and water enough, they might have held for a month!

We left a garrison there, and pushed on to Khodjent, which is forty-three miles to the east; and Shahrookh Khan, to my great astonishment, placed the Turkoman cavalry under *my* orders! Remembering the pyramid

which I had built of their skulls a little while before, I rather doubted their approving of the idea; but they seemed rather pleased than otherwise, and told me they were glad to have a chance of fighting under "a great chief like Yilderim Khan." And that's just the way with Asiatics; if you kill half of them, the other half will admire you no end.

It was tough work getting to Khodjent; for, in spite of the wonderful vegetation, the sand lies deep for miles round the city, and it was a terrible job to drag the guns through it; but we got there at last. However, the place might have held out a good while, for it had a stronger wall than Tashkent, and plenty of guns; but the fools never gave themselves the chance. The hardest trial for a soldier is *waiting* to be attacked; and they couldn't stand it, but came rushing out upon us in a great disorderly mob, to get it over at once. So then Muhammed Hassan Beg (who handled his artillery well, to do him justice) gave them a salvo or two that scattered them like sheep, and as they turned tail we were upon them, and burst into the town along with them. And then, of course, began a stabbing and killing worse than at Shekhri-Sebz; for the Bokhariotes, like all cowardly races, are very cruel when they get the chance. Then we left a garrison in the place, and marched upon Kokan.

And now, for the first time for many years, I saw the Syr-Daria again. Its banks were higher and rockier here, with little wooding on them, only great jungles of wild grass and forests of huge reeds, almost as big as those I had seen on the Oxus between Khiva and Kungrad. The soil was firmer now, and we got on pretty well, though the country was so cut up by water-courses that we had some work to get our guns along.

Up to this time the Kokanese had shown so little pluck, that it puzzled me to think how they could have resisted Bokhara so many years ; but I found out the secret when we were about half-way to Kokan. One dark night there began a fearful uproar in the camp, not far from where I was posted ; and presently a great flock of our men came scurrying past as if pursued, throwing away their arms as they ran. It was so dark that I could only just see them ; but suddenly the tents went up in a red blaze, and then it all came out like a picture. The whole camp was surging like a stormy sea—men running, stopping, turning, striking, swirling into groups, and spraying off again by twos and threes ; while mixed up with them were knots of horsemen, hewing and slashing like furies. We were surprised !

There was no time to think. The Turkomans were

about me in a moment, and with them and my own battalion I went right at the enemy. It was time. Our men had fairly given way, and the enemy were making hash of them ; and foremost of all was a tall handsome fellow on a black horse, before whom everything seemed to go down—his sword flashing and falling in the red light like a wood-cutter's axe, and never once in vain. Five minutes more, and our whole army would be routed, for Asiatics in a panic are helpless as sheep ; so I made in.

As we got nearer, I saw the enemy plainer, and a queer lot they were—short, square, flat-nosed, round-headed, with very long arms and small narrow eyes—just like Kalmucks, in fact, only yellowish instead of dark-brown. I guessed them at once to be Kiptchaks, the hardest fighters of the East, and the main strength of Kokan, just as the Uzbeks are of Khiva ; so I sent forward the Turkomans on their front, while I came round upon their flank. And there, under the red fire-light, the two races of savages met hand to hand, as they had met on the same ground centuries before. It was the fiercest fight I ever saw. They fell on with knife and sabre, and then grappled man to man, tearing each other from the saddle and rolling in the dust, kicking, struggling, clawing, fixing their teeth in one another's throats, while the very horses snapped and

lashed at each other as if they were as mad as their masters.

But now, while the Kiptchaks were all jumbled together, I and my men lét fly bang into the thickest of them ; and then again, and again, and again, till the whole place was littered with their bodies, kicking and wriggling like fish in a net. Then the Turkomans shouted and came on, while we charged in flank ; and the other divisions, getting over their first alarm, began to come up in force. So then, their leader on the black horse (who had fought like ten through it all) saw that the game was up , and, gathering what was left of his troop, he broke through the Turkomans like a stone through a pane of glass, and was gone.

This, as you may think, was a lesson to us not to be caught napping again ; and when the Emir came up, he sent me with ten thousand horse to follow the Kiptchaks, and prevent their molesting the main army during its final advance upon Kokan. In this way I missed the storming of the capital, which happened soon after ; but I didn't regret that, for now I thought of nothing but hunting down the unknown champion on the black horse. I had never seen any one fight like *him*, and I was bent upon trying which of us was the better man.

Out in the open, of course, the Kiptchaks had no chance against our greater numbers; and the only time they attempted a surprise, I gave them such a thrashing that they never tried it again. But when they retreated, and drew us after them into the mountains, we began to suffer in earnest. Scrambling up and down rocky ridges, till our horses were lamed; creeping single-file through deep gorges, with great boulders coming thundering down upon us at every step, without a soul to be seen that threw them; sitting out all night in the cold, rifle in hand, with our eyelids heavy as lead, and our heads just dropping off with weariness, yet knowing all the time that we *must not* sleep; O fathers of the world, what a time it was! Our only comfort was that the enemy suffered just as much; for we were constantly finding men lying dead among the rocks, with faces pinched and blue as a three-days' corpse; but it was just a match which could die slowest, and had it lasted much longer, there would have been more to tell and no one to tell it.

However, I knew that my offer of a reward for the fellow's head *must* bear fruit sooner or later; and so it did. One afternoon, my men brought me a gaunt, ragged, half-starved deserter, who begged for food, and offered to deliver up the chief and his whole gang.

"He has been like a king over us," said he viciously,

“ever since he came among us, no one knows whence, a year and a half ago; and, moreover, I owe him a grudge for baulking me of the richest booty that ever man had. Some months since, just before you took Khodjent, I caught a dervish trying to sneak through to Tashkent. He was ragged and dirty enough for a Mecca pilgrim; but I knew that these fellows often have money under their rags; and then (although he tried to hide it) he looked somehow as if he had once been far greater than what he seemed; so I searched him and found a silk girdle, which I ripped open; and there were three or four diamonds, the least of which would have bought the Khan’s whole palace. But just as we were rejoicing over our spoil, up came the chief; and when he saw the dervish and his jewels, his face grew black as a thunder cloud, and he shouted to him something, which one of our men who understands the speech of Hindostan, told me was either “Think of Cawnpore,” or “Do you remember Cawnpore?” and cut him down.* Then he flung the jewels into the river, saying that he had done many evil deeds, but it would soil any man’s hands to touch *them*. But *I* didn’t think so; and for that, I’ll soil my hands with his blood this night, if you are men.”

* Can this have been Nana Sahib? Vague reports are still afloat in Central Asia to the effect that the famous chief of the Indian Mutiny fled northward after its failure, and perished somewhere in Kokan.

I chose out two hundred men, and we started on foot, just after dark. He led us a long tramp, through dismal gullies and along breakneck paths, till at last we came to the foot of a dark ridge, above which the figure of a man loomed dimly against the sky.

"That's their sentinel," whispered my guide. "Send one of your men up to finish *him*, and then we'll all go up together."

I picked out a long, lithe Turkoman, who disappeared noiselessly in the bushes. There was a few minutes' dead silence, and then we saw the sentry start suddenly, and sink to the earth without a cry. Then we all clambered up, and looked down from the summit of the ridge upon the men whom we sought.

Our tread startled them, and they sprang to their feet; but too late. Crash went our volley among them as they stood out in the firelight, and down we plunged on them headlong. Then they fought like men who have no hope of mercy; but the odds were too great. In ten minutes not a man was left alive, except the captain, who, seeing all lost, took a flying leap across the precipice behind, thinking that no one could follow him. But, rather than let him escape, I would have died with him; so I flew at the leap, and *just* cleared it. The crash of my heels on the gravel

made him turn round ; and, without a word we flew at each other.

I'm a fair swordsman, but I had met my match ; and my men durst not fire at him for fear of hitting *me* ; so, feeling myself overmatched, I suddenly dropped my sword and grappled. We rolled over and over among the stones and gravel, till at last he fairly got me down, and clutching my throat with one hand, felt for his dagger with the other. Just then my knee struck something—it was the dagger, which had fallen to the ground. Like lightning I clutched it, and struck it upward under his breast-bone with all my force. Then my strength failed, and I became unconscious.

When I awoke, my men had come round the gully to me ; and he lay dead by my side. I bade them bury him where he fell, like a true soldier, and in lifting him, they noticed a little silk bag round his neck. I took it for a talisman, but it held only a small book, printed in a language I didn't know ; and I kept it as a memorial of the hardest fight I ever had.

“Have you got that book still ?” break in I eagerly, as Captain Kostarenko pauses for a moment in his story.

“Yes, it's here among my other relics,” answers he,

opening a small drawer in the table before him. "It's not much the worse for wear, you see, after all."

He hands me a small, dingy volume, with an ominous brown smear along its leaves. As I take it, it falls open in my hand—and the next moment drops on the floor as if it had burned my fingers. The book is an English pocket-Testament; and on the fly-leaf, just below the spot where the owner's blood has soaked in, I see, in a small, beautiful female hand, these words :—

"TO DEAR GEORGE,
ON HIS TWELFTH BIRTHDAY,
WITH HIS MOTHER'S BEST LOVE."*

* Lest this story should appear incredible, I may as well state that there undoubtedly *were* several Englishmen (my informants said *seven*) in the Kokanese army, all of whom had deserted from India.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMING OF THE AVENGER.

AFTER this, continued Capt. Kostarenko, I had a pretty quiet life of it for two years and more ; for although the war kept dribbling on till the summer of 1863, *I* saw no more of it. The Emir sent me back to be Beg (Commandant) of Samarcand, and keep all quiet there in his absence. I established myself in the citadel, and got about me what remained of my Russians, and lived jollily enough for a while—eating grapes and drinking sherbet (which is poor stuff after all), administering justice to the natives, drilling the recruits that came in from time to time, going shooting now and then on the mountains, where there was still a little game left ; and being altogether a kind of king in a small way.

But what I enjoyed most was galloping up and down the hills ; and I had a horse that was just fit for it—the horse of the Kiptchak chief (or the Englishman, as you say he was) whom I had slain. Ah ! what rides I used to have in the freshness of the early morning ! now rushing up a broken ridge, with the stones crashing down like hail at every stride, and then

headlong down the steep slope on the other side, with the wind whistling through my hair, and the ground seeming to melt away underneath, as if I were floating in the sky! *That* was something like living, if you like! Many a time have I ridden up to the brow of Tchepan-Ata before sunrise, and looked down upon the great city lying among all its waving woods, quiet and still as the grave—little dreaming *how* I should one day look down upon it from the very same place.

It was about this time that rumours began to creep in—dim and vague at first, but getting always clearer and clearer—of the movements of the Russians in the north. Ever since 1853 (as you'll see by the map) their position had been like two hands outstretched toward each other, the one reaching westward out of Central Siberia, the other eastward from the Orenburg district. The Orenburg hand had already got hold of the Syr-Daria as far as Fort Djulek, while the Siberian one had clutched all the country between Lake Balkhash and the Thian-Shan Mountains; so that now they had only to take the towns of Turkestan and Tchemkent in order to join hands and have a complete line of communication all the way from Russia to China. All this I learned from the caravans that passed and re-passed; and I heard, too, that our people had got light steamers on the Syr-Daria, and

that they were peopling the whole steppe with Cossack families, so many to each colony. The general opinion seemed to be that their next move would be to pounce upon Tashkent, and so become masters of the whole country at one blow.

But mixed up with all these tales there was *one* story—a very grim one—which everybody seemed to know, but which nobody liked to say much about. It was about a madman or evil spirit—no one seemed to know which—that haunted the upper valley of the Syr-Daria, and seemingly existed only to work evil to the Kokanese and to every other Asiatic that came in its way. In the midst of every battle it would go before the Russians, carrying death wherever it went; and even when there was no fighting going on, it would appear suddenly every now and then, sometimes in one place and sometimes in another—and never without doing some terrible mischief. Villages were burned, no one knew how; men were killed by scores, no one knew when or by what; crops were destroyed, camels and horses killed or hamstrung, household stuff made havoc of; for the remarkable thing about this creature was that it never seemed to *keep* what it took; it cared only for destroying. Often and often, in the midst of a great merrymaking, some man would leave the rest just for one moment, and never come back; and when

they went to look for him he would be found dead, with a cross cut on his forehead, which was always the destroyer's mark. So terrible had this persecution become that the spirit of the Kokanese was quite broken; and the boldest robbers of the steppe had grown so timid that they hardly ever went on a foray now, and then only in parties of a hundred or more together. Some of them called the creature "The Avenger," but the general name seemed to be "Shaitaun-Zadeh" (son of the devil).

At first I only laughed at all this, taking it for an exaggerated version of the exploits of some dashing cavalry officer with a handful of brisk Cossacks; but I soon changed my opinion. On all other points—the marches and skirmishes of the Russians, the new forts, the steamers on the river—these fellows would talk readily enough, but whenever the story of Shaitaun-Zadeh came up, they mentioned it so unwillingly, and with such downright horror that it impressed even *me* at last. However, do what I would, I could never get at the rights of the story; and it was only the merest chance that gave it me at last.

One day there came to me a batch of Kokanese deserters, whom the Emir, not liking to trust them in the field against their own people, had sent me to enrol in the garrison; which I did. Now, I should tell

you that one of my ways was to go round the posts in disguise (like some old Caliph whom the Persians used to tell me stories about) to see if all was right, or if any one had cause of complaint. So one night I mixed unperceived with a knot of soldiers who were sitting talking at the citadel gate; and in their talk this story of Shaitaun-Zadeh came up. Then one of the Kokanese recruits, who happened to be among them, struck in,—

“You are mistaken, friends; Shaitaun-Zadeh is neither madman nor Djinn (evil spirit), but a man like ourselves. I, who speak to you, have seen him with my own eyes!”

“Have you?” “Where?” “When?” “Who is he?” “What is he like?”

“He is a Sirhenk (Colonel) among the Russians, and a brave man; and I have heard say that in former days he was merciful to our people, never killing any save in fair fight. But it chanced that his wife and child went with him to a lonely outpost on our border; and, while he was away on an expedition, our people fell upon the place, and slew the soldiers, and burned the station; and in the fire both his wife and his child perished. So when he came back and found what was done, he swore a great oath that while he lived and breathed, his hand should be heavy against us; and

that for every hair on the heads of those whom he had lost he would take the life of an Asiatic. And in truth he has kept his word. May the curse of Allah be upon him ! ”

“ And where is he now ? ” asked a dozen voices.

“ Who can tell ? Ask where the wind is, or the lightning. Where he is least expected, there will he always be. If he were to rise in the midst of us this moment, I should not wonder ! ”

Here I forgot myself, and started forward into the circle, to make sure of the story. But the fellows were so frightened by all these old wives’ tales, that they took me for Shaitaun-Zadeh come up in person, and flew fifty ways at once, with a yell fit to raise the dead. You never saw such a scramble ! but I managed to get hold of the Kokanese, and took him off to my quarters to question him. But all I could find out was, that this bugbear was a short, square-built man, with a hooked nose and heavy moustache, and dark hair just beginning to turn grey ; and that his name was Napraz Khan ; which, being an Asiatic rather than a Russian name, left me as much in the dark as ever.

It was some little time after this, that, one evening in autumn, I was riding home from looking at the digging of a new watercourse, a little way down the

Zer-Affshan valley, on the other side of the Tchepan-Ata. It was getting dark already, and I was making all speed down to the river (for it's no joke crossing the Zer-Affshan in the dark after the autumn rains, with a tired horse), when suddenly my beast stumbled and fell, crushing my leg under him.

He recovered himself directly ; but when I tried to rise, such a frightful pain went all through my leg, that I judged it must be either broken or very much hurt, and that all I could do was to lie still till some one found me ; which, as this was the lonely season, with neither caravans nor foot-passengers about, wouldn't be very soon. So there I lay, hour after hour, half-frozen with cold, and yet not daring to move for fear of the pain. To make matters worse, it began to rain ; and in a trice I was drenched to the skin, and all the ground under me turned to soft plashy mud, in which I sank deeper and deeper. That night seemed as if it would never end ; and the only comfort I had was, that my poor horse stood by me through it all, putting his face wistfully down to mine every now and then, as if asking what he could do for me.

At last, just as it began to get light, I thought I heard a distant trampling. My horse pricked up his ears, and gave a shrill neigh. I shouted, but there was no reply. I shouted again with all my strength, and

this time there *was* an answering cry. Presently the outlines of men and beasts showed themselves dimly through the grey shadows, and the next moment I was surrounded by a circle of curious faces ; but when they tried to lift me up, the pain came back with such a sharp, sudden pang, that I fainted outright.

When I came to again, I found myself laid on a shawl, with one man supporting my head, and another wrapping a wet bandage tightly round my hurt limb, while a third seemed to be giving directions. The voice of this third man struck me, and I looked up at him. He was a tall, stately old man, with a long grey beard, and a look about him that somehow made all the rest seem small and poor in comparison. He had taken his cap off, and I saw that his head was shaven all but a long lock above each ear ; and by that, as well as by his black funnel-shaped cap and broad girdle, I knew him for a Bokharian Jew.

“Carry him to the waggons,” said he, when the bandage was fixed, “and clear a place for him therein, that he may lie at ease, and that his hurts be not galled. Say nothing, my son,” he added, as I tried to thank him ; “thou hast neither strength to speak, nor I time to hearken ; we must go our way, and that speedily. Drink this.”

He handed me a small silver flask, and I drank.

Whatever it was, it sent me so sound asleep, that I remembered nothing more till we halted for the evening, many miles on our way. The old Jew brought me some food, and asked very kindly how I felt, and said he had taken care of my horse. Then he told me that he had been removing all his property from Bokhara, for since the death of the old Emir (who always favoured and protected the Jews) people had begun oppressing and plundering them as before; so now he was going back to his country-house at Djizak, where he hoped to live unmolested.

"You should join the Russians, father," said I. "They've come pretty close now; and *our* people don't ill-treat strangers, anyhow!"

"*Our* people, say'st thou, my son? Art thou, then, a Russian? I took thee for a Bokhariote."

"And yet you helped me, taking me for an enemy!"

"Why not, my son? Hath the God of our fathers bidden us to discern between friend and foe, when we succour one that is afflicted? Is it not written in our law, how Jehoram, the son of Ahab, set great provision before the armies of Syria, whom he had made captive?"

I can't tell you in what a grand, simple, hospitable way he said this, like some noble old king, accustomed to entertain men by thousands at a time. My heart

smote me when I remembered how often I had spoken against the Jews since my adventure with Abraham Levi ; and in the heat of the moment I spoke out.

“ Father, I ask your pardon. A Jew once did me an ill turn, and for his sake I’ve hated the whole breed ever since ; but, by Heaven, if they were the worst rascals on the face of the earth, I’d think well of them for *your* sake ! ”

“ I have nothing to forgive, my son. I know well ” (and a look of deep sadness came over his face) “ that our nation is despised and rejected of all men, and shall be so till the Deliverer come. I know, too, that among us, even as among the Gentiles, there are false witnesses and sons of Belial ; but, I pray thee, condemn not all for the sins of a few.”

He spoke so gently and so kindly, that I fairly hung my head, feeling more ashamed of myself than I had ever done before. But the old man only laid his hand softly on my forehead, saying, “ The God of Abraham bless thee, my son ! ” and went quietly away.

When he came back, I begged him to find me a messenger, telling him who I was, and that I must send word to Samarcand of what had happened. He instantly offered me one of his own servants ; and I, borrowing his writing-materials (for the Eastern Jews seem never to travel without them), wrote a letter to

my second in command, telling my mishap, and bidding him keep strict order till I returned.

"Even had we known who thou wert, my son," said the Jew, "we could not have brought thee to Samarcand; for to carry any man over those hills with such a hurt as thine, were but folly and cruelty. Thou must needs go with us to Djizak, where thou shalt rest many days; and I, even I, will be thy physician, having somewhat of skill in the art. I cannot promise thee such lodging as befitteth the Governor of Samarcand; but whatsoever goodwill may do to welcome a guest, that shalt thou have at the hands of Shalom the son of Pharez."

And Shalom Pharezovitch was as good as his word; for all the way to Djizak (which we took two days more to reach, having to travel slowly), he was as kind as if he had been my father. He seemed never tired of trying to amuse me, and keep me from thinking of the pain; and with his wonderful power of talking, and his having seen so many things which I had never even heard of, I was really almost sorry when, one evening, just about sunset, the great cliffs of "Tamerlane's Gate" (the pass at the mouth of which Djizak stands) rose up before us like the porch of a great cathedral.

An hour later, we halted at a big gate in a high mud wall, opening upon a wide courtyard, behind which

stood the prettiest little house possible. I was soon in a comfortable bed, where I slept ten hours at a stretch. As you may think, I didn't see much of the house *that* night ; but I may as well describe it you as I got to know it afterwards.

It was built in the form of a hollow square, like our farm-houses on the Don. Along the four sides of the inner face ran a broad verandah, just the place for hot weather ; and in the middle lay a dainty little garden, with a well in the middle, the little white wall of which looked very pretty against the green grass. It was a two-storeyed house (a rare thing in Bokhara) and built chiefly of earth, though with a good deal of wood about it. The windows were of fine gauze instead of glass, and I noticed that those of the ground floor were all fenced with iron bars, as if to guard against attack.

Most of the servants (of whom there were five or six, all Jews) slept in the verandah ; and the ground-floor rooms were chiefly filled with merchandise of different sorts. Upstairs there were several small bed-rooms, a large hall which seemed meant to walk about in when it rained, a magnificent bath-room, and, 'last but not least, a library. When I began to get better, I took to this last with a will ; for I was always fond of reading, though it's a strange taste for a Cossack soldier ; and here I learned so many things about Russia, and even

about the Cossacks, that I had never heard of, that I was quite astonished. Above all, there were plenty of maps ; and I liked to look at all the places where I had been, and measure the distance to the Russian outposts, and see how far they had to go yet to get to us ; for my one thought now was to see a Russian army marching upon Samarcand, and myself along with it.

Well, it was good six weeks before I was fit to mount a horse again, and all that time the old Jew kept me like a prince. At first I saw no one but himself ; but after a few days he was always accompanied by a very beautiful girl of thirteen or fourteen, whom he spoke to as " my daughter." But when I came to look closer at her, I saw that she had long golden hair, and grey eyes, and a fair complexion—all as unlike as possible to the old man's swarthy face and piercing black eye. Then, too, her accent was quite different from his ; and, altogether, I made up my mind that she was no more his daughter than I'm Emperor of China. But then came the question, who was she ? and I puzzled over it (for when you're ill, a thing *won't* come out of your head when it's once in), till at last my curiosity got the better of my good manners, and I spoke out.

" Father, it seems to me that your daughter's not much like you ! "

The old man laughed. " Thou art right, my son ;

and I would have told thee all before, but feared to startle thee, being yet weak. The damsel is no daughter of mine, but a Russian like thyself ! ”

“ A Russian ! who ? where from ? how did she come here ? ”

“ Thou shalt hear all from her own mouth this evening ; then mayest thou judge whether I have done that which is right toward her, or no.”

Accordingly, that evening, while the old gentleman was smoking his long pipe beside the well, the young lady seated herself beside my couch on the verandah, and told her story. Her guardian had bought her from a band of Kirghiz, who had found her lying unhurt amid the ruins of a Russian station which they had burned, and taking her to be something supernatural on that account, were very careful of her. She had lived with the old Jew six years, and was very happy ; but he seemed afraid of any one seeing her, and kept her as close as possible.

“ Do you remember your father at all ? ” asked I.

“ O yes ! he was an officer ; I remember how I used to play with the buttons of his uniform. I remember mamma better, though ; she was small and slight, but very pretty. I remember she wore a gold cross round her neck, and used to give it me to kiss sometimes.”

As she said that, there came upon me a strange

bewildering feeling, as if some one had told me all this before ; but do what I would, I could make nothing distinct of it.

“The first thing I remember,” she went on, “is living beside a great river, and seeing the soldiers fishing in it, or gardening along the bank. Then I remember going a long journey across the steppe, to some place at the foot of a range of hills ; and there was nobody with us but a few soldiers. And then I remember how, one night, there began a terrible noise of shouting and firing outside ; and mamma crouched down in a corner of the block-house, under the holy images, and took me in her lap, looking very pale and frightened. And the noise got louder and louder, and there was a great smell of fire, and everything got hot all at once ; and mamma lay down on the floor, and covered me with her body ; and then came a great crash, and I remember nothing more till I found myself in the hands of the Kirghiz.”

Then a thought flashed upon me. It seemed too extravagant to be possible ; but still I thought I'd chance it.

“Don't you remember your father's name at all ?”

“No ; I've tried often and often, but I can't recall it.”

“But your own name—surely you must know that ?”

“O, I remember *it* well enough ; they all used to call me ‘Lenotchka.’”

I started up, never heeding the pain it gave me—clutched her wrist, and threw back her sleeve to the very shoulder. And there, sure enough, on the smooth white skin, pricked in with gunpowder, was the Double Eagle of Russia !

The mystery was out at last. The terrible avenger, Shaitaun-Zadeh or Napraz Khan, was my old friend Major *Naprashkin* ; and this girl who had nursed me was his daughter, my little playfellow of Fort Raim.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

YOU may think what a piece of news this was to them both ; but they took it very differently. Elena (I mustn't call her Lenotchka any more) was so overjoyed at finding that she had actually a father still alive, and not very far away, that she was not so much disturbed as I expected at the thought that the terrible Shaitaun-Zadeh, of whom she had heard so many grim tales, was her own father. But the poor old Jew, when he heard it all, said never a word ; he only looked at her with a long, wistful, tender look, as if now, for the first time, he began to realise the possibility of some one claiming her from him. I quite pitied him when I saw how he felt it ; and it struck me that here was another bait to draw him over to our side, which I was determined to do, if only to save him from the ruin now gathering over Bokhara.

And now came the time for me to say good-bye, for the Emir had come back from the war several months before, and all over the country there were troops being disbanded, and garrisons relieved, and different things.

put in order ;—and it wouldn't do for me to be away from my post. I was sorry to go, though ; for (apart from Elena's being her father's daughter) this was the first touch of kindness and real friendship that I had met with since poor little Noorna died ; and in the midst of the countless rascalities among which I had been living, it came in like a fresh spring in a desert. However, when a thing has *got to be* done, done it must be ; so, early one morning (after promising to come and see them again as soon as I could), I mounted my horse to ride back to Samarcand.

“The God of our fathers bless thee and keep thee, my son,” said the old man, lifting his hands over my head like some grand old prophet blessing his soldiers before a battle.—“May thy goings be established, and the desire of thine heart be given thee !”

And then Elena stepped forward, and threw over my neck a ribbon that she wore, with a little wooden cross (carved by herself) hanging to it, and whispered—“Keep it to remember me by,—and may God protect you till you come again !”

Her look, and her words, and the very tone of her voice, were all so like Noorna, that they quite upset me. I muttered something, I don't know what—seized her hands in mine, and kissed them again and again—and then turned and galloped off as if there were a pack of

wolves after me. But all the way back to Samarcand, Noorna's words kept ringing in my ears—"Thou wilt yet return to thine own people, and among them thou wilt find one who will love thee as I have done." I didn't dare to hope that I *had* found her ; but it comforted me to think that even here, in this accursed place of darkness and evil, on which the judgment of Heaven was about to fall, there was still *one* pure heart lifting itself up for me daily and nightly to God.

When I got back to Samarcand, the soldiers were very glad to see me again (for, as I've told you, I was always a favourite with them), and for a few months everything went quietly enough. But towards the end of summer, there came news that startled us all.

A party of Kirghiz had just come in from Tashkent, across the Hungry Steppe, bringing word that the Russians on the Syr-Daria were in motion again. They had moved up the river from Djulek, and taken the town of Turkestan, while another detachment, moving westward from Fort Vernoé, had seized the stronghold of Aulié-Ata. Nothing now lay between them but the town of Tchemkent, which, in spite of its high wall and rock-cut citadel, was safe to go at the first push ; and then the Russian line would be unbroken from Orenburg to the borders of China. Tchemkent once gone, Tashkent itself would undoubtedly follow next, for the

Kokanese, bled to death as they had been by the Bokhariote invasion, were in no case to resist ; and then there would be an end of Kokan as an independent Power, and Russia would be free to turn her whole strength against Bokhara.

You should have seen Samarcand that day !—the streets thronged with dark faces, livid with fear or black with rage ; the clamour of tongues all going at once, yelling for vengeance on the unbelievers, questioning about fresh news, or telling all sorts of cock-and-bull stories of what *had* happened—among which, as you may be sure, the old legend of Shaitaun-Zadeh came up in a grimmer shape than ever. And as with Samarcand, so with all the other towns : it was a regular panic from one end of the country to the other—just as if this were not the very thing which they ought to have been expecting all along ! But you might as well look for plums on a bayonet as for forethought in an Asiatic.

However, now that it was too late, the Emir *did* set about defending himself, seeing that he was now left like the last apple in the bag, to be eaten as soon as his turn came. But everything was so clumsily managed, that before he was half ready, news came that Tchemkent was gone too. You see, Colonel Tcherniaieff, who commanded the detachment that took Aulié-Ata, had joined the Syr-Daria column a little farther

on, and, marching suddenly upon Tchemkent, took it as easily as one would drink a glass of tea. Finding the way so clear before him, he thought at first of trying Tashkent too ; but afterwards he decided not to risk it, and left it alone for that year. (This was in October 1864.) But in the summer of 1865 he came back with a bigger force, escaladed the wall of Tashkent at night, and took it—so crushing at one blow the power of Kokan, and leaving Bokhara single-handed. So then the Bokhariotes woke up in earnest, and girded themselves for the final struggle.

You may think what good news all this was to *me* ; and I enjoyed it none the less from having to be always running over to Djizak with convoys and what not, so that I saw a good deal of Elena and her guardian, But when I heard of the fall of Tashkent, I thought it high time to speak to him seriously. I told him plainly that his life wouldn't be worth a kopeck in the troubles that were at hand ; and that even if he escaped, his property would not, and Elena would not. I reminded him that the Russians were sure to establish a post at the ferry of Tchinaz, on the Syr-Daria ; and that from Djizak to Tchinaz, across the Hungry Steppe, is only eighty miles at the outside. It would be a rough ride, no doubt ; but better rough it abroad than be robbed and murdered at home ; and therefore, the

best thing he could do would be to turn all his property into money or jewels, find some disguise for Elena, and slip across with her and me to the Russian outposts.

I saw that he was struck by what I said, so I left him to think it over; but next morning I managed to catch Elena by herself for a minute, and told her what I had said, and begged her to back it up. And so she did, to some purpose; for, two days later, Shalom told me he had decided to take my advice, and was going to see about selling his property forthwith.

The next thing was to find out how near the Russians were; for if they had sent any scouting parties across the river into the steppe, and we could manage to fall in with one of them, it would save us a great deal of risk and trouble. So I suggested to the Commandant to despatch a reconnoitring party; and he, little dreaming *why* I did it, thought it a good idea, and sent off thirty horsemen that very night. They were to go as far as Murzarabat (a big tomb about halfway across the Hungry Steppe) camp there, scour the country all round, and then, if they saw nothing suspicious, come back again. The distance being only forty-three miles, we thought that four days, or five at the most, should be enough; but when a whole week passed, and there

was no sign of them, the whole town began to get rather uneasy.

Shalom and I were strolling about the bazaar one evening, when we saw a great crowd collected ; and, coming up, found in the middle of it a man lying on the ground as if fainting or dead. He was half stripped, and his skin burned into great blisters by the sun—his bones starting through the skin, his feet bare and bleeding, his face plastered with dust and sand-flies—in fact, he was the most wretched object imaginable. As the crowd seemed to think that their duty lay in standing staring at him, rather than in giving him any help, I shouldered my way through them, and asked what was the matter ?

A dozen voices answered at once. Some said he had been robbed, some that he was plague-stricken (at which there was a visible widening of the circle round him), some that he was bewitched, or had seen the "Demon of Waste Places;" while a few who seemed to have some sense, hinted that he might be in want of food. The only thing they *did* agree about was, that he had come staggering in, no one knew whence, and fallen down before he could say a word.

"I'll soon find out what's wrong with him," said I. "Lift him up, some of you, and bring me a bowl of water—quick!"

My uniform, and the tone of command that I used, had a wonderful effect ; for a little bullying goes a great way in Central Asia. Taking the water, I began to wash the sand from his face ; but I had barely got it clean, when some one screeched out, "May Allah preserve us ! it's one of those thirty horsemen !"

Then they all looked at each other in silence—as well they might ; for if the only man who had come back, came in such a plight as this, *where were the rest ?*

The sick man opened his eyes, and murmured, with a kind of gasp, "Shaitaun-Zadeh !"

At that terrible name, the inquisitive crowd bore back as if from the mouth of a cannon ; but old Shalom, who feared nothing, came to the front like a man.

"The man lacks food," said he. "Let him be brought to my house, and we will minister to him."

So I paid a couple of men to carry him, and he was soon snug in Shalom's house, eating like a starved wolf. It was not till the next day, however, that he was able to talk much ; and then he told a tale that made us shiver.

They had got to Murzarabat all right, and camped there ; and he stood sentry. During the night, his

horse broke loose and strayed, and he went in pursuit, but could not catch it ; and losing sight of it at last in the darkness, came back very much put out. When he got back to the mouth of the tomb where the rest were sleeping, he was struck by the dead silence of the whole place ; he couldn't even hear them breathe. Stepping in, he stumbled over something which he instantly felt to be a dead body, still warm. Then he got frightened, and cried out ; but nothing answered except the echo of his own voice from the walls. The farther in he went, the more of them there were ; corpses heaped upon corpses, and every one (as he could feel) with the *cross cut in the forehead*.—Shaitaun-Zadeh's mark ! Then a horror fell upon him, and he ran blindly away ; and in the morning he found himself lost, and wandered he could not tell how long, without food or drink, till he was so spent that he flung away his arms, and even threw off most of his clothes. At last he stumbled upon the right track, and just managed to crawl in before his strength gave way altogether.

When he had done, we all sat and looked at each other without a word.

I must confess that I've seldom been more shocked in my life. Not that I pitied the Bokhariotes—they had wronged me too deeply for that ; but it was fright-

ful to think of the bright, pleasant, kind-hearted man who had held me on his knee and promised to be my father, being changed into such a destroying demon as this. All the killing that *I* had done was in broad daylight, on an open field; but this unseen death that came like a creeping pestilence, licking up men's lives in the dark without sound or trace, had in it something frightful and unearthly. But, to my amazement, Elena seemed to look at it quite the other way.

"They fell upon *us* in the dead of night," said she, "just as my father has fallen upon *them*; and he never burned women and children alive as they did. They're only having their own measure meted out to them. If I were a man, I'd go and fight by my father's side to-morrow; but woman as I am, if ever I come into a pitched field where the Russian flag is flying against the unbelievers, you shall see that I will not be the last to follow!"

(And so I *did* see, later on—in a way I little dreamed of).

We kept the fellow till he was able to get about, and then let him go. Had I known, then, *what* was to come of our entertaining him, I'd have struck him dead on the threshold; but, as our proverb says, "a Russian is always wise too late." *

* Literally, "is strong with behindhand wisdom."

But when his story got abroad, the whole town was in a perfect panic. Every one expected to see the Russian bayonets come glittering over the steppe, with Shaitaun-Zadeh leading them on; and if they *had* come they might have walked right into the place without firing a shot. As I afterwards learned, Tchernaiëff had actually started for Djizak with a strong detachment; but they ran short of food and water before they were much more than half-way, and had to turn back; for which failure Tchernaiëff was superseded, and Romanovski put in his place.

By the spring of 1866 (I give the dates as I got them later on from a Russian officer) the Emir had got his big army ready at last, and marched out into the steppe "to tread down the unbelievers." I, of course, expected to have to go with him; but whether it was that he thought I might take it into my head to desert when I got within reach of my own people again, or whether he wanted to leave some one behind who could keep order in his absence—at any rate, he left me in charge of Samarcand as before, and went on without me. And I wasn't sorry either; for I had heard rumours of a Russian scouting party having planted itself at Murzarabat, and I thought this would be a

good chance of slipping off to join them, and taking my two friends along with me.

A little after the departure of the army, I rode over to Djizak again — not with any idea of pressing Shalom to desert at once, but just to see how he was getting on with his preparations. He told me that he had already turned most of his property into jewels, some of which were hidden in his girdle, while others were stitched up in Elena's dress; and we were just discussing our plans and rejoicing at the thought of being soon beyond the reach of our enemies, when suddenly we heard a dull rolling sound, which came nearer and nearer, and stopped at our gate.

Presently up came a servant, with a very pale face. "Master, the horsemen of Bokhara are at the gate, demanding entrance in the king's name; and they are strong and many, and armed with weapons of war!"

"Let them enter," said Shalom quietly. And in an instant he unclasped the girdle that held the diamonds, and handed it to me. I had barely time to fasten it round my waist when we saw by the moonlight the horsemen pouring into the yard. There seemed to be twenty-five or thirty of them altogether, armed with lances and sabres; in the belts of three or four I thought I could make out pistols as well. Some order seemed to be given, and then half-a-dozen of them dis-

mounted, and came tramping up the stair to the library, where we were sitting.

Shalom opened the door, and stood before them, with his arms folded on his breast, and the lamplight falling on his grey hair and grand calm face.

"What seek ye?" asked he.

Before his eye, and the sound of his voice, the cowards bore back (as such dogs always must before a true man), and there was a moment's silence. But my heart sank when I saw in the rear the cunning face of the traitor whom we had nursed when he was starving, and who now came to repay us by sacking the house that had sheltered him; and I vowed in my inmost heart that, come what might, that man should not live to see the sunrise.

"What seek ye?" asked Shalom again.

"We are sent by the king to bring you and your daughter before him," said the Judas whom we had saved, "and to take charge of your property, lest it fall into the hands of the Russians."

"Show us the royal warrant, then," said I, stepping forward; "we do not trust to word of mouth in the king's business."

At that they looked blank, and began whispering together; but I saw that the hindmost were handling their sabres, and egging each other on to make a rush.

I would have flown at them, but Shalom gently pushed me back.

"This is *my* matter," said he, "and I will deal with it. Hear me, ye men of evil! Think ye that I will buy my life by giving up to the wolves my one little ewe lamb, which hath been unto me as a daughter? As the Lord liveth, there shall not a man of you pass this threshold till ye have slain me. Strike, if there be one among you who hath forgotten that he himself had a father!"

Ah! how grand he looked, the noble old patriarch, defying that cowardly scum on his own threshold! For a moment the rascals stood as if struck dumb; and in that dead hush I could hear the beating of my own heart. Then came the chuckling laugh of the traitor, and the click of a pistol-lock.

"Are you all afraid of an old man? I'll clear the way!"

There was a crack, and a smoke, and a heavy fall—and there lay poor old Shalom at my feet. With one stroke I cut the murderer down, drove back the rest with a flourish of my sword, and, dragging the old man into the library, barred the door.

Elena ran to lift him up, but he was dead. She bent down and kissed his forehead, and then her whole face hardened suddenly like frozen clay.

"Twist those shawls into a rope, and drop it from the window," whispered she; "*I'll manage the rest!*"

She caught up the lamp, and had all the hangings ablaze in a moment; and then, leaning out of the window, cried in a deep hoarse voice, "Fire! come and help us!"

The men below, seeing the blaze, and fearing to lose their booty, rushed into the house pellmell. The moment they were gone, she slid down, I following. My horse came instantly to my call, while she mounted one of theirs; and with three slashes of my sabre I hamstrung three horses, and rushed to the gate. But just outside we found a sentinel, who, seeing me passing, shouted to me to halt, and tried to seize me. Just then something flashed behind him in the moonlight—there was a dull "plug," like an arrow striking turf—and he fell forward on his face, a dead man; while Elena, flourishing her bloody knife, dashed after me at full gallop.

I shall never forget that ride! First the blind scramble in and out of the narrow lanes, uncertain which way to take, but knowing that every moment's delay might cost us our lives; then the sudden plunge into the darkness of the great, silent prairie, with the dull trampling of pursuit growing up behind us in the cold black distance; then, through the long

hours of the night, the headlong scurry in the dark, with the pursuing tramp growing ever louder and louder; till, in the first grey of morning, we began to see the great steppe stretching drearily away on every side, and, far in the rear, a long file of shadows coming on straight and mercilessly, like hounds in sight of the game.

I think my head must have begun to turn; for I began to imagine all sorts of things. It seemed as if we were standing still, and the enemy coming on like the wind; as if the earth caught hold of our horses' feet and kept them back; as if we were slipping backward at every step, while the dead villain whom I had left lying on the threshold, face upward, were hovering at my side, with a mocking grin on his dead face, whispering always, "No escape! no escape!" If ever you've had a nightmare in which you seemed to be flying full speed from some horrible danger, without ever advancing a step, you'll know how I felt then!

At last, far in the distance, I saw a dark spot begin to grow up out of the hot brassy yellow of the desert. It was so far off, that that was all I could see; but I knew what it must be—the Tomb of Murzarabat, where the Russian reconnoitring party was encamped. Once there, we were safe; but just then Elena's horse (a poor one compared with mine) began to slacken speed. A

few strides more, and it began to stumble ; and then down it came on the sand !

Luckily she managed to slip off as it fell ; and in a moment I had her up behind me, and we were off again. But the delay, and the overweighting my horse, helped them to gain on us ; and presently I heard the crack of a carabine, and a bullet whistled past my head.

“ Let me shift you round in front ! ” panted I ; “ better they should kill me than you ! ”

“ You don’t know yet what a Russian woman’s made of,” answered she, in a fierce whisper. “ Go on ! ”

But by this time the archways of the tomb were pretty distinct, and I suddenly saw a white figure come out of one of them, and look toward us. Even at that distance, and after all those years, I knew the old Cossack uniform, and gave our “ Hurrah ! ” with all my strength. It was shrilly answered, and out came a dozen men, mounting hastily. At their head was one that looked like an officer, who just gave one look at our pursuers, and the next moment came by me like a whirlwind, straight down upon them. I heard a cry of “ Shaitaun-Zadeh ! Shaitaun-Zadeh ! ” and saw the Bokhariotes turn to fly ; but their horses had no strength left for that, and our men were among them in a moment. Then my head spun round, and I



“ ‘You don’t know yet what a Russian woman’s made of,’ answered she, in a fierce whisper ‘Go on!’ ”—*Page 216.*

rolled heavily from the saddle, dragging Elena after me.

Ten minutes later, the officer came slowly back, wiping his sword on his horse's mane ; and the desert vultures settled down upon nine carcasses which had once been the best soldiers of the Emir.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE OF IRDJAR.

WHILE some of the Cossacks were settling our pursuers, the rest were attending to me and Elena ; and I can tell you I needed it. It wasn't so much the fatigue or the danger that upset me, as the feeling that, after all these weary years, I was a free man again, and among my own people ; and then the thought of meeting my old guardian again, and giving him back his daughter, fairly made my head go round. I just managed to call out in Russian, "Look to the lady !" and then my voice failed altogether.

But they needed no bidding to be kind to us ; it was enough for them that we were Russians, just escaped from the clutches of the heathen. One rough fellow propped my head on his knee ; another emptied his flask into my mouth ; a third fetched water and sprinkled my face with it ; while a fourth, clapping me on the shoulder, bade me cheer up.

"Never fear, brother ! you're among friends now, and nobody shall touch you. We'll take care of you and your lady, as Christian men ought."

But if they were kind to me, they were kinder still to Elena, who, having kept up her Russian by talking with Shalom, was luckily able to thank them in their own tongue. It was wonderful to see how they thought of everything that could make her comfortable, and all so quietly and respectfully, that there was no chance of her being frightened or offended. I hear that in Western Europe folks are fond of talking about "the barbarous Cossack," and making him a byeword for everything that's savage and wicked; but our people know how to be gentle with women and children, after all. A Russian who had lived a good while in London said to me once, that if we were to beat our wives like the English, there would be a pretty row!

But now back came the Colonel, and I took a good look at him. I need hardly say that he did not recognise me a bit; and but for the sure proof I had, I should never have known *him*, so terribly changed was he. It was all the difference between a house decked out for a festival, and the same house gutted by fire. The fine outline of feature was still there; but the frank, kind face was now drawn and haggard as a corpse, and in the depths of the sunken eyes burned a silent, hungry expectation, that chilled one's blood to see. Ah dear! he had heavy wrongs to avenge, no doubt; but revenge is a sword that cuts both ways.

I was rather puzzled what to say to him ; for I feared to blurt out the news too suddenly, and yet I could devise no way of softening it down. At last I decided that the shortest way would be the best.

“Good morning, Feodor Ivanovitch ; it is long since we met last !”

“And who are you who know my name so well ?” asked he, starting. “I don’t remember you.”

“Perhaps you may remember my father, then—and how you held his head on your knee one moonlight night, out on the Orenburg steppes, long ago.”

The Colonel drew back for a moment as if something stung him, and then gripped my hands with a force that almost made me cry out.

“Are you my boy Ostap ? Thank heaven, I am not *quite* desolate, then. God has been gracious to me !”

“More gracious than you think, Feodor Ivanovitch. You are glad to find a son—how would it be if you found a daughter too ?”

“Don’t speak of that !” cried the Colonel fiercely. “I had but one daughter, and she is dead long ago !”

“Not dead, for yonder she stands. Elena Feodorovna, come here a moment, if you please.”

Elena, who had caught enough of our talk to guess who he was, came at once, and, stretching out her hands to him, said timidly, “Father, won’t you speak to me ?”

You should have seen his look ! He gazed at her for a moment as if his whole soul went into it, and then, muttering faintly, " Her mother's face ! " dropped his head on her shoulder, and fairly burst into tears. The soldiers who were standing round, turned away and hid their faces ; and I was glad enough to hide mine too.

It was just as well (for such shocks need some counterpoise), that at that moment two Cossacks came galloping up. They had been sent out as scouts by the Colonel two days before, and came to report that the steppes to the east were quite covered with Bokhariote soldiers, all marching northward.

" It's the Emir's army," said I ; " I was to have gone with them, if I hadn't been in charge of Samarcand. I know all about them."

" Do you, my lad ? " cried the Colonel, who, at the first word of battle, was himself again in a moment. " You may be of great service to us, then ; for my orders are to fall back upon the main body at the approach of a superior force, and you can tell the General all you know."

So off we all started (after swallowing a mouthful of food to keep us going), and by nightfall saw the camp-fires of Romanovski's army twinkling along the bank of the Syr-Daria. The next morning, I was sent for to the General, and found him sitting over a rough map ; and

with him a short, square, powerful-looking man, with a broad florid face, and a mouth hard as iron—together the most soldierly-looking fellow I had seen for a long time. This was my first sight of Abrâmoff—he that's Governor of Samarcand now. Many a time have we talked it over since then; and when you see him at Samarcand, you can just put him in mind of it.

Romanovski I didn't like so well. He was a slim, middle-sized man, with a brown face and dark whiskers, and hair rather thin over the forehead—not bad-looking, but with the kind of face that made you think he would do very well up to a certain point, and not an inch beyond. And the "inch beyond" was just what he was coming to now.

I told him all I knew, and he let me go; and a few days after, I heard that we were to march eastward to Irdjar (where the Emir was said to be encamped), and observe his movements. On the way we picked up two or three prisoners, and I advised sending them back with a message that all the Persians in the Emir's army should be rewarded and sent home if they would desert to us—which, as I knew, would set all the others against them, and make a split in the army. The General took my advice, and did so.

It was a fine May morning when we first came in sight of the enemy; and a grand sight they were.

They had thrown up earth-works here and there, and planted their guns in battery ; and, far as we could see, the whole plain was one mass of black caps and white turbans, blue robes and yellow cloaks, crimson scarfs and striped tunics, gay pennons and gleaming steel. Such a mere handful we looked in front of that great host, that it was no wonder if the General began to think that he had been in too great a hurry to tackle them.

So he called in Pestalkör and Abrâmoff, who commanded the cavalry and artillery ; and the three of them talked it over. Romanovski was for falling back at once, and waiting for reinforcements ; but the other two strongly objected. They said that the mere rumour of any Russian force having shown its back to native troops would be a death-blow to our prestige in Asia—let alone that the Bokhariotes were enough to eat us without salt, and that, if we tried to retreat under their very eyes, not a man of us would ever get across the Syr-Daria alive. But Romanovski didn't seem to see it, and decided on retreating forthwith. So then the other two pretended to agree with him, went out as if to obey, and then—gave orders to open fire at once !

The Bokhariotes were surging like a sea behind their guns, and the least sign of flinching on our part would have brought them all upon us at once ; but before they

could make up their minds to do anything, our mortars and rocket-battery, which had come up within fair range, opened right into the very thick of them. Shells and rockets were quite new things to *them*; and when they saw these things come plumping into their midst, bursting and killing right and left, they were frightened out of their wits. In a moment a kind of madness seemed to run through the whole army. Some few tried to rush forward and charge us, but were fallen foul of by the rest, who accused them of trying to desert. Some threw down their arms and burrowed in the ditches; others fell upon the Persians, remembering my message to them, and suspecting them of treachery. Men fired at their officers, officers cut down their men; while our shot kept pelting in among them, mowing them down like grass. In the heat of the firing, a shell fell among some of their ammunition, and it all went up in one great bang, blowing heads and limbs about like dry leaves in a storm. Then Romanovski (who, seeing the battle going well, had come out to join us) saw his chance, and ordered a general charge of cavalry.

The Colonel and I were on the extremity of the line, and got first into the thick of it; for our horses carried us well over the dry ditches, and the next moment we plunged right into the great tangle of dark faces and many-coloured robes, like men riding through

a clover-field. And like ripe clover did they go down before us, trampled and sabred—a few of them firing one or two spattering shots, and then running with the rest. In the very thick of the press, I came upon three or four companies of Persians who had once belonged to my regiment, and shouted to them to face about. When they saw me, and heard my voice, they faced about in a moment (right glad to have a chance of paying out their old enemies), and swept the Bokhariotes before them at the point of the bayonet, stabbing and killing without mercy. Then all gave way ; and the battle melted into a mere butchery, worse than Shekhri-Sebz or Khodjent.

By this time the smoke and din, and the sight of blood, and the feeling of having a fair chance at my enemies at last, had worked me up so that I hardly knew what I was about. I let my horse go where he liked, hewing with all my strength at everything that came near me ; and all my men did the same. But *the* sight to see was the Colonel, when once he got fairly in among them ! Wherever they were thickest, there was *he*, riving the press with his charge, trampling, hewing, thrusting—all blood from head to foot, with his coat almost torn from his back, and his eyes starting like a mad dog, but still killing and killing as if he would never tire. We were still in the very heat of it, when

my horse put his foot in a hole. Down we both came together, and the pursuit swept by us like a hurricane.

O! but that was a black day for Bokhara! Far and wide the whole plain was littered with their carcasses, like the leaves in autumn. Their entrenched camp, and all their guns, and the sacred standard itself, fell into our hands; and of the prisoners and wounded there was no account made, for they were numberless. Where our fire had cut through them, the best of the Life-Guard lay in long swathes, like corn lashed down by the hail. Two of their Generals were taken, and five more killed; and with them fell the chief of the irregular horse, and Hassan Beg, the head of the artillery, and the Captain of the Guard, whom Colonel Naprashkin cut down through cap and skull to the teeth. It was the first time they looked us in the face, and it was the last; for, ever onward from that day, their hearts melted within them at the very sight of our uniform. That day's work decided the fate of Central Asia.

And when all was over, and we returned from the pursuit—there, where the dead lay thickest, we found Elena supporting the head of a wounded Bokhariote, and pouring water into his mouth.

I looked anxiously at the Colonel, fearing he might be angry with her for helping an enemy. His face

worked for a moment, as if choking something down ; and then he stroked back her hair gently with his terrible right hand, red to the very wrist with fresh blood, and kissed her forehead.

“God bless you, darling !” said he, brokenly ; “you’re doing a woman’s work. If your mother had lived, *she* would have done the same.”

And then he turned away, and I saw him no more that night.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST STRUGGLE OF BOKHARA.

THE battle of Irdjar was a settler to the Bokhariotes; for although the war dribbled on a few months longer, they never made any real stand after that. In October we took Djizak and Oura-Toubeh, and so cut them off altogether from the Syr-Daria, and threw them back upon the valley of the Zer-Affshan. Colonel Naprashkin was left in command of the garrison of Djizak, and the first thing he and I did was to go over the house where Elena and the poor old Jew had lived so long. It seemed strange to me to return as a conqueror to the place whence I had fled for my life; but all our triumph could not bring back the dead; and as I stood by the window out of which we had clambered, and looked round upon the blackened, half-burned walls, and the dark stain where the old man's blood had soaked into the floor, my heart was heavy as lead.

However, it's no use regretting what is past; and all that winter, and all the next spring, I had a very pleasant life of it. I noticed a great change in the Colonel now that he was so much with his daughter. His face

was stern as ever, but the old bloodthirsty look seemed gradually melting away ; and whenever he spoke to her or looked at her, there was a gentleness in his manner that reminded me of what he had been in the old days at Orenburg, before the great blight fell upon his life.

And she ? Well, she was so wrapped up in her father, that she took but little notice of me. However, I knew this was only natural, and tried to bear it bravely. But now and then she would come and ask me all sorts of questions about her mother (for she never dared speak of her to *him*) what she was like, and how she spoke, and what she used to do, and what she had said to me, and how she had petted her as a child—till the tears came into her eyes as she listened.

“How I would have loved her, if she had lived !” said she once. “I shall never have a mother now ; and my father is the only thing I have left !”

I hung my head, and said nothing.

“The only relation, I mean,” she went on quickly, guessing my thoughts. “I shall never forget what you have done for me ; but he and I have been parted so long ! If I’m a good deal taken up with him now, don’t think it’s because I’m ungrateful !”

I kissed her hand as she held it out to me, and went

away a little comforted ; but after that we had no more talks together for a long while.

All this time Bokhara was falling to pieces of itself—the people quarrelling among themselves, and everything going to rack and ruin. I heard afterwards that the Emir would have been glad enough to give in, but (just as with Khiva in the last war) the violent party stood out, and wouldn't let him. In the autumn of 1867, the year after Irdjar, he made shift to send an army against us ; but a handful of our people made hash of it at Yani-Kurgan, and he didn't dare to try it again. However, he still shilly-shallied, and would make no treaty with us ; so at last Kaufmann (who was now Governor-General in Romanovski's stead), determined to settle the thing once for all, and marched upon Samarcand.

I remember, as if it were only yesterday, the morning of the last battle, when we stood together on the bank of the Zer-Affshan (then in full flood, and rushing like a mill-race), looking up at the great purple ridge of Tchepan-Ata, now all ablaze with gay dresses, and fluttering banners, and glittering weapons. There they were, thousands upon thousands, come to fight their last battle for the Holy City and the existence of Bokhara. For a moment I was haunted by a strange

feeling of having seen all this before, I couldn't tell where; and then there flashed upon me the remembrance of the *second vision* shown me by the conjuror at Shekhri-Sebz.

Then stepped forward Colonel Naprashkin (who was to lead the assault), with a stern gladness in his eyes, like an over-toiled man who sees the end of his work near. He eyed the masses of the enemy for a moment like a reaper eyeing his harvest, and then spoke:—

“Lads, our father the General has ordered us to storm those heights, and *therefore it must be possible*. Forward!”

With the last word came a plunge in the water, and the next moment we were all struggling breast-high in the foaming current, which clutched us like the hand of a giant, and tried to drag us down. And then, in one moment, crash, bang! the ridge overhead was one blaze of cannon and musketry, and down came the shot pelt-ing among us, and the roar of the river, and the rumble of the great pebbles underneath, and the din of the cannon, and the war-cries of the enemy, went up into the still air in one great thunder-roll. Can't I remember, even now, how I raged at feeling the current pushing me back when I wanted to be on and at them, or what a fierce longing I had to get past these stupid, inanimate things—the soulless water, and the senseless

cannon—and come at something which could be cut and killed like ourselves!

At last the water got shallower, and we came out upon firm ground. I never felt gladder in my life than when, through the smoke, I saw right in front of me the bright robes and dark faces of the enemy, almost within reach. But I ought to have known better than to think that any Asiatic rabble would ever stand the charge of Russians in open field. Before we could get near them, I saw their line begin to shake; and then it split up like ice on the Volga, and scattered away on every side. Their guns were abandoned, their arms flung away—it was an utter rout. Then we all hurrahed at once, and it became a regular race for first up; but the Colonel and I headed the rest, and, leaping on the carriage of the nearest gun, waved our fellows on.

Just then I saw one of the hindmost fliers face about and take aim at the Colonel. I tried to pull him aside, but too late. The bullet hit him full in the chest, and down he went; but he hardly touched the ground, when I was half-way to the fellow that did it. The villain ran for his life; but if I had followed him round the world, I'd have had him. Before he had gone fifty yards, I was on his back. Up went my sword, and down it came, and he rolled at my feet.

among the stones, with his head cut off like a thistle-top.

Then I went back to the Colonel, and found him lying where he fell, and beside him—Elena! I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw her—safe across that river under that fire; but I might have known that she would never stay behind when her father was forward under the Russian flag. She had pillowed his head upon her bosom, and was wiping the damp from his forehead, as I came up.

“Are they beaten?” asked he, faintly.

“All to pieces,” answered I. “Samarcand’s ours to-morrow. This is the last of Bokhara.”

“Then I’ve lived long enough!” said he, his eyes sparkling with triumph. “So perish all unbelievers, and may the Russian flag go forward to the ends of the earth! Lena, my pet, take this knife—the knife with which you killed that hound at Djizak—and bury it with me, that I may show those who are gone before that my daughter does not shame her race!”

For a moment his face looked terrible as in his worst days; but, as she bent over him and kissed him, it softened again.

“I’m going to see your mother again,” he went on, with a strange light of gladness in his eyes, “and we shall have time to know each other *yonder*, though.

here we were together but a little while. I will tell her that I have found you again—it will be good news for *her*. And yet—it seems hard to lose you again so soon ! ”

I tried to answer him, but the words would not come. Elena bent her head down, and I saw that the hand she held was all wet with tears.

“ I don’t leave you quite alone, though, darling,” said he presently ; “ thank God, I have a good protector to leave you to. Give me your hand, child—and yours too, Ostap. I called you my son long ago, and though I cannot live to see it, my son you shall yet be ; and when you are happy together, think sometimes of your old father ! ”

I looked at Elena. She drooped her eyes, and her face flushed ; but as he put her hand in mine, it met me with a strong, warm clasp, that sufficiently answered me.

Then a kind of faintness seemed to come over him, and he spoke no more for some time. When he did, his face was wonderfully changed ; the grim look that had been on it ever since his wife’s murder was clean gone, and he looked just as he might have done in the old days at Fort Raim. And to Fort Raim his mind had gone back, plainly enough ; for when he spoke again, it was as if Elena were still a baby, and the pet of the garrison.

"Don't cry, my pet," said he, in a little, mincing, playful voice—so different from his terrible war-shout! "See, here are the soldiers come to take you out for a walk. Take care of her, lads; she's but a little thing yet, you know. Bye-bye, darling; mamma and I will come and look at you in half-an-hour or so."

Elena drew his head closer to her, and we all sat silent for a time. Suddenly a bright, tender smile came over his face, making it just the dear old face I had known long ago;—and he said, in his old caressing way, "Good-night, dear—papa's going to sleep!"

His head fell back as he spoke, and his face, with that smile still upon it, settled into stillness for ever.

The grass is green on the battlefield now, and the ridge for which we fought that day lies far within the Russian border, beyond sight or sound of war. But in all our goings to and fro, my wife and I have never passed it without turning aside to hang a wreath upon a plain wooden cross, half-way up the hill-side, upon which is painted in rude letters:


"HERE RESTS THE BODY OF

FEODOR IVANOVITCH NAPRASHKIN,

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